

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上の ホライゾンⅢ

下

GENESIS Series
Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon III <C>

After the dragon line reactor explosion caused by M.H.R.R. above K.P.A. Italia's Itsukushima, the history recreation of the "Sack of Magdeburg", the greatest defeat of the Thirty Years' War, finally begins. Meanwhile, Toori's group makes their way to the steel tower outside Magdeburg where the M.H.R.R. Chancellor Rudolf II is imprisoned. Where will Hexagone Française, M.H.R.R. Catholics and Protestants, the busty mom, and the flat daughter's intentions lead them? And what choice will Musashi make amid it all?

This concludes the third story of the academy fantasy story that takes place in the Far East which contains medieval Japan and the other nations of the world.



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イラスト: さとやす

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GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾンIII(下)

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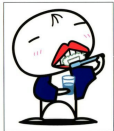
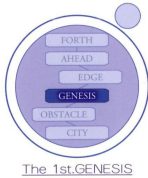
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ISBN978-4-04-868735-5
C0193 ¥930E

ASCII
MEDIA
WORKS
Published by ASCII Media Works

Recommended retail price: 930 円
*Consumption levy will be added to the price separately



Kawakami Minoru

Born January 3, 1975 and from Tokyo. Is currently in the height of summer. "During this season, rhinoceros beetles and other bugs crash into my window with incredible force." Is that something to be jealous of or afraid of?

[Dengeki Bunko Novels]

City Series

Panzerpolis 1935

Aerial City

Tune Bust City Hong Kong <A>

Noise City Osaka <A>

Closed City Paris <A>

Panzerpolis Berlin 1-5

Virtual City DT <A>

AHEAD Series

Owari no Chronicle 1-7

GENESIS Series

Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon I <A>

Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon II <A>

Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon III <A>

[Dengeki Novels]

Renshaou <A>

Illustrations: Satoyasu

Born in Yamagata and raised in Tochigi. "The delicious mincemeat cutlets I had recently really boosted my opinion of mincemeat!" But it turns out mincemeat was a seasonal item at their restaurant.

horizon
on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.03



Installation

installation

■Reine des Garous■

Her inherited name is the Viscount of Turenne. Turenne led the French army from before Louis XIV's era and led France to many victories during the Thirty Years' War as Marshal General.

France had created a national army by that point, but it was also a time of great change on the battlefield. Turenne managed to adapt to those changes because he had studied history and strategy and because he trained several unique commanders.

This may have given him a solid foundation and the ability to apply that foundation as needed. Of course, as he continued to achieve remarkable results, he led France toward being the ruler of Europe. However, he had difficulty speaking due to his stutter and he admired the Protestants, so he was not just a simple hero. I feel he was a more complex human being.

Mito's mom, the Reine des Garous, is a representative of Europe's non-humans, so she is highly non-standard.

That said, I think it works if you think of her as someone who leads France to victory.

Her standard position is the adult who enjoys herself around the children, but to a child who is aware what they lack, she is nothing but a bother.

She is a troublesome person who enjoys the children's antics because she is happy that she is not being left out.

That type of character tends not to get too involved, but when I tried having her get involved, the reader's reacted well and I'm thankful.

And it makes you wonder just how much Mito takes after her father.

Her mother probably finds that irresistibly cute.
(Kawakami Minoru)

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**Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the
Middle of Nowhere - 3C**



—Don't go.

III

下

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

—Don't go.

Characters



character

2

Name: Minamoto Yoshitsune

Faction: Kakura Academy

Position: Chancellor and Student Council President

Style: Strike Forcer

Special: Flat-Chested Great King of the Hassou Tobi

Name: Satomi Yoshiyori

Faction: Satomi Academy

Position: Chancellor

Style: Heavy God of War Pilot

Special: Composed Young Man

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World



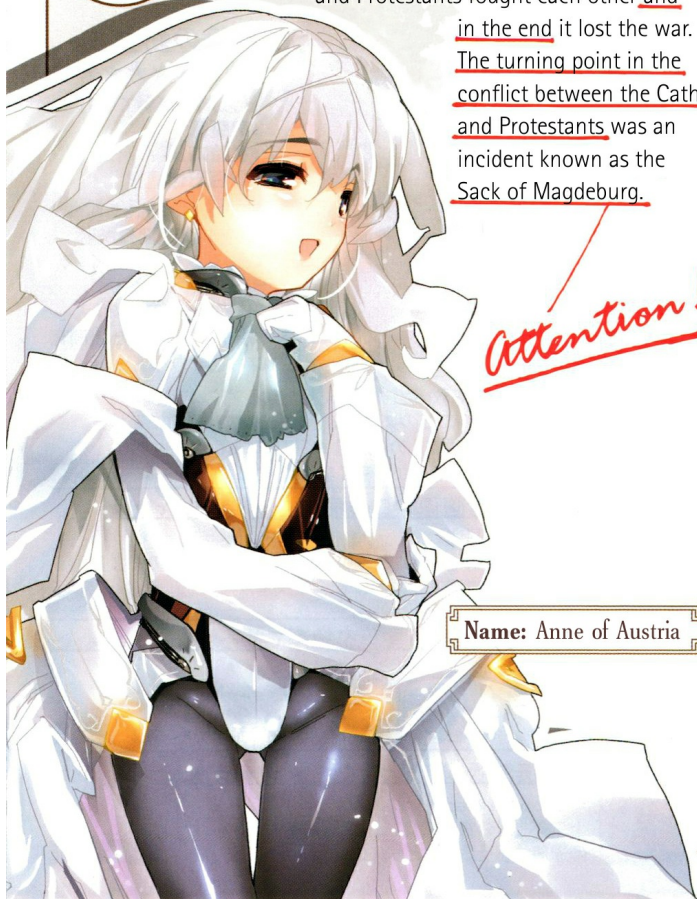
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world

During the Thirty Years' War, it fought the surrounding nations while its own Catholics and Protestants fought each other and in the end it lost the war. The turning point in the conflict between the Catholics and Protestants was an incident known as the Sack of Magdeburg.

Attention!

Name: Anne of Austria



• "M.H.R.R." •

●Holland

Family-wise, M.H.R.R. would be the eldest of it and its brother nations, Hexagone Française and K.P.A. Italia.

●Magdeburg

●Hexagone Française

It was a nation of principalities ruled by knights and royals.

●K.P.A. Italia

In the fight to become the ruler of Europe, M.H.R.R. was given the imperial throne by the pope, but the right to crown that emperor was held by the pope. Later, the emperor was chosen in an election, but even that fell into ruin and, at the same time, the Reformation occurred and sent the empire into decline.

Name: Mazarin (Luynes)



world

M.H.R.R.

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Map:

Top: Holland

Center: Magdeburg

Left: Hexagone Française

Bottom: K.P.A. Italia

Name: Mazarin (Luynes)

Name: Anne of Austria

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■ Announcement of New Arrivals



High Hopes for this New Work!

: Rating: ★★★★★∞

: "Asama-Sama Shoots 8"

: Black Hair & Wings

: 36 Pages

: 500 Yen

This month, the popular series "Asama-Sama Shoots" (or "Asa-Shoot" for short) has reached its 8th installment! In 7, Asama-sama shot the seaweed monster to get back Suzu-sama, but this time, she has developed a new shooting technique to rescue

Masazumi-sama from the seaweed monster! And it would just be rude to point out there's no reason for a new technique when the previous ones have all worked perfectly. She loves going for overkill.

Buy-ong



I cringed when I saw a picture of the author on the cover! ★★★★★★

• "Dark Cross Taira Clan Legend"

The MC's hidden blood from the Jomon period has finally reached the thirtieth giga-awakening! As a hymn washes over Dan-no-Ura, the showdown between chosen ones begins.

Buy Your Own
Awakening



It is time you learned the meaning of regret! (Unmeasurable)

• "Our Slope"

Buy it and you'll regret it!

Try It and Feel Regret



Did you know this is a reprint? ★★★★★★

• "Loup de Debut"

After twelve years, a reprint is reaching an international audience! It must be tough being in that family, but don't worry about it!

Buy (Giant and Flat)

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Box: Buy (Giant and Flat)

Far Eastern History

極東史

Far Eastern History

AIRI.A.D.U.S.T

First of all

Mankind creates and falls victim to unexpected crises
Sometimes they pull through, sometimes they do not
Hopefully, viewing that history of theirs will be of some help



Ⅲ〈C〉

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Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)
Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)
Book Design Concept: TENKY

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Characters

character

Academy Affiliates

Oriotorai Makiko
High-speed battling teacher.
Always wears a track suit.

"Musashi"
Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.

Sanyou Mitsuki
Class 3-Banboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.

Hexagone Française

Louis Exiv
Hexagone Française's chancellor. Refreshing young man known as the Roi-Soleil. Has divine blood.

Anne of Austria
Hexagone Française's previous chancellor and student council president. Dai's younger sister.

Henri of the Three Musketeers
Female combat-style automaton. Acts as the leader and as Terumoto's bodyguard. Uses large remote-controlled swords.

Isaac of the Three Musketeers
God of war automaton and gunner. Fairly serious.

Mouri Sisters
Three automaton sisters who have inherited the names of three of Mouri Terumoto's uncles.

Sakai Tadatsugu
Musashi Ariadust Academy's president.
Used to be a very able person but was demoted.

Yoshinao
King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.

Mouri Terumoto
Hexagone Française's student council president. Delinquent type. Destined to be Musashi's enemy as leader of the Western Army.

Lady Luynes
Vice president and Anne's aide. Has Treasurer Mazarin as a double inherited name.

Armand of the Three Musketeers
Male combat-style automaton. Uses broad-range gravitational control.

Reine des Garou
Turenne. Hexagone Française's vice chancellor. Mitotsudaira's mom.

M.H.R.R.

Guericke
Provisional mayor of Magdeburg in the Protestant state of Saxony. Performed experiments known as the Magdeburg Hemispheres.

Rudolf II
A pervert with a complicated past. M.H.R.R. Chancellor and Emperor. Effeminate.

Maeda Toshiie
Catholic representative. Has become a ghost and is peacefully between jobs as he spends his days with his wife Matsu.

Luther
First name is Martin, leader of the Protestant Reformation, and representative of Protestantism. Is actually Tomoe Gozen.

Matthias
Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!

P.A. Oda

Sassa Narimasa
One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type.

Takigawa Ichimasu
P.A. Oda's commander who excels at castle building and ship operation.

Matsunaga Hisahide
Retainer charged with the Ki Peninsula. Will eventually rebel against Oda and blow himself up along with the Hiragumo kettle.

Shibata Katsuie
One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.

Kuki Yoshitaka
Leader of P.A. Oda's iron ship fleet.

Other

Satomi Yoshiyori
Satomi Academy's chancellor. Gentle. Uses Murasame and the god of war Yatsufusa.

Satomi Yoshiyasu
Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.

Honganji Kennyo
AKA Suleiman. Leads the Idoou-Shu and left with a portion of the Miao forces. Anti-Oda.

Musashi

Aoi Kimi
Toori's older sister and worshiper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tension and selfish in practice.

Asama Tomo
Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.

Adele Balfette
From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.

Ohiroshiki Ginji
Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.

Shirojiro Bertoni
Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.

Toussaint Neshinbara
Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.

Nate Mitotsudaira
5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.

Noriki
Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.

Hassan Furubushi
Cajps logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.

Horizon Ariadust
Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa. Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismol Opl.

Honda Masazumi
Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.

Margot Naito
3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.

Mukai Suzu
Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.

Tachibana Gin
Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style blise arms. Fifty times.

Mishina Hiro
Granddaughter of the engine department's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.

Aoi Toori
Protagonist. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.

Azuma
Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.

Itou Kenji
Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.

Kiyonari Urquiaga
2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.

Tenzou Crossunite
1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.

Naomasa
6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.

Nenji
Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.

Heidi Augesvarer
Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.

Persona-kun
Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.

Honda Futayo
Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.

Malga Naruze
4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.

Miriam Poqou
Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.

Tachibana Muneshige
Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.

Mary Stuart
Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.

character

● Musashi

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● M.H.R.R.

- Guericke: Provisional mayor of Magdeburg in the Protestant state of Saxony. Performed experiments known as the Magdeburg Hemispheres.
- Luther: First name is Martin, leader of the Protestant Reformation, and representative of Protestantism. Is actually Tomoe Gozen.
- Rudolf II: A pervert with a complicated past. M.H.R.R. Chancellor and Emperor. Effeminate.
- Matthias: Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!
- Maeda Toshiie: Catholic representative. Has become a ghost and is

peacefully between jobs as he spends his days with his wife Matsu.

- **P.A. Oda**

- Sassa Narimasa: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type.
- Shibata Katsuie: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.
- Takigawa Ichimasu: P.A. Oda ninja commander who excels at castle building and ship operation.
- Kuki Yoshitaka: Leader of P.A. Oda's iron ship fleet.
- Matsunaga Hisahide: Retainer charged with the Kii Peninsula. Will eventually rebel against Oda and blow himself up along with the Hiragumo kettle.

- **Other**

- Satomi Yoshiyori: Satomi Academy's chancellor. Gentle. Uses Murasamemaru and the god of war Yatsufusa.
- Satomi Yoshiyasu: Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.
- Honganji Kenryo: AKA Suleiman. Leads the Ikkou-Shu and left with a portion of the Mlasi forces. Anti-Oda.

Glossary

words

Q

•**Qing-Takeda:** Combination of China and the Takeda clan.

R

•**Religion:** Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

•**San Mercado:** Tres España brand.

•**Shaja:** Used in Mlasi regions and means "understood". Originally meant "courage".

•**Shinto:** Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.

•**Shirasago Enterprises:** IZUMO's shrine brand.

•**Sign Frame:** Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.

•**Song of Passage:** Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.

•**Spell:** Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.

•**Spirit Spell:** Primitive spells used by talking to and borrowing the power of spirits, which are ether with a will of its own.



•**Student Council:** The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.

•**Substitution:** Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.

•**Sviet Rus:** Uesugi clan + Russia.

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•**Testamenta Arma:** Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.

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•**Tsirhc:** A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

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•**Judge/Judgment:** Means "understood". Used by criminals.

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•**K.P.A. Italia:** Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

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•**Ley Line:** The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

•**Ley Line Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.

•**Logismoi Oplo:** Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

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•**Magic:** Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.

•**M.H.R.R.:** Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.

•**Mikawa:** Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.

•**Mlasi:** A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.

•**Mouse:** A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.

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•**Musashi Ariadust Academy:** The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.

•**Musician:** A religion's worshiper.

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•**Oat:** A religion based on China's sages.

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•**Orei Metallo/Water:** Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

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•**P.A. Oda:** Oda clan + Ottomans.

•**Peace of Westphalia:** The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.

•**Protestant:** A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.

•**Provisional Council:** Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

•**Ether Engine:** An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.

•**Ether Fuel:** Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.

•**Ether Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.

•**Europa:** Hexagone Française's primary corporation.

•**Excalibur:** Has a first and second version.

•**External Blessings:** Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

•**Fan Gang:** Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.

•**Far East:** Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

•**Fino Alba:** K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

•**God of War:** A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.

•**Graduation:** No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

•**Grande y Felicisima Armada:** Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.

H

•**Harmonic Territory:** Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.

•**Harmonic Unification War:** A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.

•**Harmonic World:** A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.

•**Hexagone Française:** Mouri clan + France.

•**History Recreation:** Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.

•**Holy Spells:** Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

•**H.R.R.M.:** Holy Knights Ironworks Guild. Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Catholic principalities.

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•**Inherited Name:** The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.

•**Internal Blessings:** blessings stored within oneself.

A

•**Academy:** An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.

•**Academy Rules:** The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.

•**Amako clan:** Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.

•**Apocalypse:** The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.

•**ArchsArt:** England's primary corporation.

•**Armada Battle:** A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.

•**Artificial Apocalypse:** A compressed ley line distortion created in England's Avalon to research the Apocalypse.

•**ATELL:** The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

•**Avalon:** A space created in England to research the artificial Apocalypse.

B

•**Blessings:** The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

•**Catholic:** The old mainstream version of Tsirhc.

•**Chancellor's Officers:** An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.

•**Contradiction Allowance:** The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

•**Divine States:** Former name of the Far East.

•**Divine Weapon:** A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

•**Dragon Line Reactor:** A bomb that uses a runaway ley line reactor to destroy a wide area.

•**Dunhi:** A religion. Focused on reincarnation.

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•**Edel Broken:** Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.

•**Eisenritter:** Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Protestant principalities.

•**Emperor:** A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.

•**England:** Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.

•**Ether:** Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.

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[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

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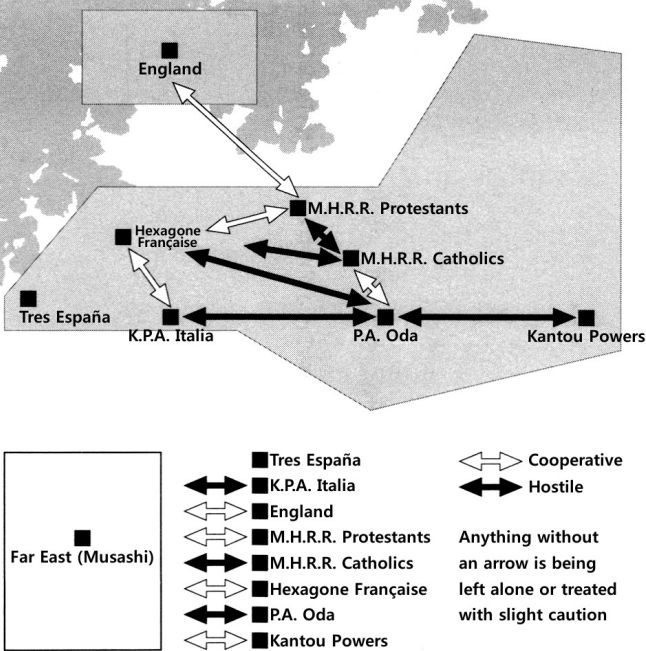
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World

world

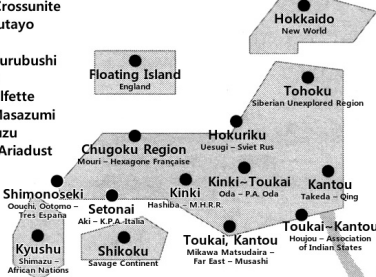
Relationships Between the Major Powers (as of 3-C)



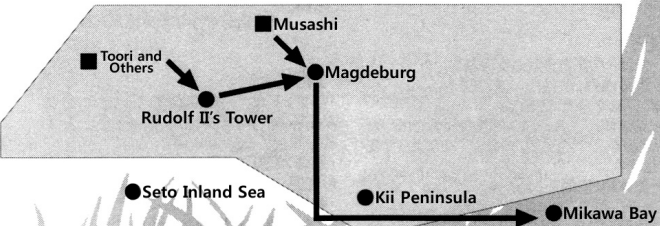
Divine Chat Screenname List

• Azuma	: Azuma	• Mal-Ga	: Malga Naruze
• Asama	: Asama Tomo	• Marube-ya	: Heidi Augesvarer
• ANA	: Anne of Austria	• Novice	: Toussaint Neshinbara
• Obscene	: Itou Kenji (Itoken)	• Musashi King	: Yoshinao
• Me	: Aoi Toori	• Four Eyes	: Shakespeare
• Gold Mar	: Margot Naito	• Former Delinquent	: Mouri Terumoto
• Righteousness	: Satomi Yoshiyasu	• Worshipper	: Ohiroshiki Ginji
• Scarred	: Mary Stuart	• Dragon Dog	: Lady Luynes
• Silver Wolf	: Nate Mitosudaira	• Laborer	: Noriki
• Still Got It	: Reine des Garous		
• Wise Sister	: Aoi Kimi		
• Lady AM	: Tomoe Gozen		
• Smoking Girl	: Naomasa		
• 1020	: Tenzou Crossunite		
• Tonbokiri	: Honda Futayo		
• Sticky King	: Nenji		
• 83	: Hassan Furubushi		
• Hemisphere Man	: Guericke		
• Flat Vassal	: Adele Balfette		
• Vice President	: Honda Masazumi		
• Bell	: Mukai Suzu		
• Hori-ko	: Horizon Ariadust		

Far Eastern Powers



Musashi's Plans



Once the Musashi and Toori meet up near Magdeburg, they will travel from the Seto Inland Sea, through the Kii Peninsula, and to Mikawa where they will fight the Battle of Mikatagahara with Yoshitsune and the others.

world

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Far Eastern Powers:

[Same map as on 3-A's introduction page.]

Musashi's Plans:

Upper left square: Toori and Others Upper left circle: Rudolf II's Tower Upper middle square: Musashi Upper middle circle: Magdeburg Lower left circle: Seto Inland Sea Lower middle circle: Kii Peninsula Lower right circle: Mikawa Bay Once the Musashi and Toori meet up near Magdeburg, they will travel from the Seto Inland Sea, through the Kii Peninsula, and to Mikawa where they will fight the Battle of Mikatagahara with Yoshitsune and the others.

Relationships Between the Major Powers (as of 3-C)

Top left: England

Far left: Tres España Above K.P.A. Italia: Hexagone Française Top center: M.H.R.R. Protestants Middle center: M.H.R.R. Catholics Far right: Kantou Powers

Box: Far East (Musashi)

Nations:

Tres España

K.P.A. Italia

England

M.H.R.R. Protestants M.H.R.R. Catholics

Hexagone Française

P.A. Oda

Kantou Powers

Stuff to the right: Cooperative

Hostile

Anything without an arrow is being left alone or treated with slight caution

School Rules

Article 207

- Any nation recreating the Testament descriptions will be protected from interference from other nations.

Article 207 Line 1

- Any nation recreating the Testament descriptions can receive intervention or support that will facilitate that recreation.

Chapter 60: Warriors in a Place of Rest

CHAPTER 60

"Warriors in a Place of Rest"



What do you do
When the unexpected arrives?
Point Allocation (Introduce Yourself)

What do you do

When the unexpected arrives?

Point Allocation (Introduce Yourself)

In central Magdeburg and in the plaza in front of the Maurice Cathedral, Masazumi ate a late lunch.

...I can finally get some food in my stomach.

A large stone had been set on the ground with the top cut away to form a bench. She sat there eating the fried mincemeat on bread that Futayo had gotten for her. It had come with sauerkraut and boiled sausage, so she added some to the bread and set them aside.

“This is all so salty.”

...I'd love some kind of stew or something. ...And the bottled beer they gave me doesn't have any hops in it. Are they treating me like a child?

However, this was the battlefield and an M.H.R.R. city. It played an important role in the history recreation, so everything was being done in the Western fashion. Plus, she was lucky to get any food at all during a time of war. Complaining about the primarily salty food was not going to help.

Futayo had returned to the ration tent and was eating any food as soon as it was cooked, so it seemed some with a Far Eastern diet still preferred stronger flavors. The crossdressing men doing the cooking were delighted.

“My, my. This girl is eating all the food as fast as we can serve it. How lovely!”

“Your big sis is going to have to get cooking!”

“Thank you,” said Tonbokiri.

Masazumi was thankful that the girl and her pet were so passionate about interacting with other nations.

But that morning when the Magdeburg residents had been evacuated by the Musashi, the food rations had helped them relax. Masazumi realized that food could really have a calming effect.

...Oh, this mincemeat, sausage, and bread are really good together.

She did not usually like meat all that much, so it meant a lot for her to think that. She looked around and saw the local warriors eating like normal. She had a feeling this only seemed so valuable to her.

But then...

“Vice President Honda-kun, we really can’t seem to contact K.P.A. Italia. It would seem something has happened.”

Neshinbara walked over from the cathedral. He wore primarily sand yellow personal clothes that were a little too big for him and he had several sign frames open around him as usual.

“Well, given what we saw, K.P.A. Italia should have put up a pretty good fight with the Murakami Navy, but it seems there is still no word from the PR committee members the different nations sent to the border. If the divine transmissions are cut off, there must be some kind of regional jamming in effect.”

“Do you think K.P.A. Italia will win?”

“I think they will successfully defend themselves.”

Masazumi tilted her head at that. She also stopped eating her sauerkraut and sausage bread long enough to add quite a bit of the whole-grain mustard a crossdressing cook had given her.

“Weren’t they ignoring the history recreation? Historically, all six iron-clad ships returned safely.”

“M.H.R.R. was breaking the rules quite a bit themselves by sending in Suzuki Magoichi. Whatever the case, the Murakami Navy will be destroyed, but I bet K.P.A. Italia will claim the history recreation of the iron-clad ships is none of their business. In other words, their sinking will be M.H.R.R.’s mistake.”

“The Pope-Chancellor has a way with words, so he probably could pull that off. But in that case, will it come down to the Murakami Navy? And it’ll be do-or-die for them. ...Oh, but you don’t have to explain about them. I’m sure it’ll be really long.”

“But it’s really interesting! Even if it is long!!”

A new sign frame appeared next to Neshinbara’s face. He shouted “Like I said before! Why are you listening in on me!?”, so she could guess what that was about.

“You need to stop flirting on the job, Neshinbara.”

“Dammit. Why does everyone take her side!? Can’t you take the man’s side just once!?”

“Sorry, but given where we are, we’ll have to take the Ger-man’s side.”

Everything fell silent.

Neshinbara and everyone else in the plaza stopped moving or speaking. Asama was the first to speak from the cathedral’s steeple where she was performing divine transmission work.

“Ah, wah! I almost fell off! Don’t fall off, Asama! You can’t let yourself fall!”

“C’mon, my joke wasn’t bad enough to deserve that kind of ‘fall’-out,” muttered Masazumi.

Asama really did fall at that. At the same time, the Aoi sister was looking out a window just below the steeple.

“Heh heh. Those people all look like my citizens down there! I can hold an entire populace in my arms!!”

Asama fell into her spread arms and she automatically adjusted her arms to catch the girl.

“Some giant breasts just fell from the sky! ...Oh, it’s you Asama. Are you offering yourself to me as a present!?”

When she saw that, Masazumi thought about saying something more, but Neshinbara cut in.

“W-wait, Vice President Honda-kun! Don’t say anything else! There’s nothing more to support them below!”

“How is this in any way my fault?”

“Heh heh heh. Asama! Tell her the truth! ...And you really are heavy. Wait, your shirt opened and Hanami is buried inside. Pwa ha ha ha ha! Like this morning! Ha ha ha ha!”

“Kimi, please don’t pass that off as a weird habit of mine!!”

The two of them lost their balance and fell.

The god of war Righteousness made a frantic short jump, caught them in its hand, and lowered them to the ground.

Masazumi sighed and looked away from them.

“Anyway, Neshinbara. What do you think is the situation in K.P.A. Italia?”

“Eh? O-oh, right. ...You really have gotten used to our class, haven’t you?”

“Please don’t assume my life is in that awful a state. ...And can we please get back on topic?”

“Of course.”

Neshinbara pulled a charm-covered bottle from his coat pocket and took a drink.

“Whatever the result, M.H.R.R. will make their next move. For example, their aerial warship Shirasagi – also known as Himeji Castle – is currently somewhere in stealth mode and has yet to show itself. However, I expect it will make an appearance once the battle with the iron-clad ships is complete,” he said. “Also, P.A. Oda is suspicious since they’re working with M.H.R.R. After all, people from other academies aren’t allowed in P.A. Oda beyond the major highways and not much is known about Lake Biwa since it is surrounded in a large stealth space and only authorized individuals are allowed in. ...Apparently, a castle connected to Hashiba left there in stealth mode.”

“So the Nagahama or the Sunomata?”

“Most likely,” agreed Neshinbara. “But even then, Aki’s Itsukushima is K.P.A. Italia’s headquarters, so it won’t be easy to conquer. If anything, I would think the Pope-Chancellor has the advantage here.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because they need to land if they’re going to occupy it. They need to take control of the city’s buildings, secure the important individuals and assets, and mop up any hidden resistance. All of that requires sending actual people into the city. That’s what makes urban warfare so much more difficult than out on a field. ...Are you listening?”

“Oh, yes, of course. Judge.”

“You aren’t, are you? ...Well, along that line of thinking, the Pope-Chancellor has Stithos Porneia and I expect their headquarters are fully prepared for urban warfare. From K.P.A. Italia’s viewpoint, this invasion is sudden, but once they eliminate the threat of the iron-clad ships, they can endure a few days until another nation intervenes. So to sum up, K.P.A. Italia will not win, but they will be able to defend themselves.”

“So that’s what you meant. I see.”

Masazumi nodded, bent her sauerkraut bread and placed it in her mouth.

...Oh, the flavor of the bread goes pretty well with the spicy mustard and the sour cabbage.

Although it’s so strong I would get sick of it pretty quickly, she added while wondering if she should have had the bread cooked longer to make it more aromatic. She decided to try that at home sometime and took a breath.

“In that case, what do you think M.H.R.R. will do?”

“If Hashiba plays it safe, they will send ambassadors to the other nations, telling them not to send K.P.A. Italia any aid and to negotiate for the time they need. And...they’ll probably send one here, too.”

“Here?”

“Judge.” Neshinbara nodded. “I expect they’ll send one to Hexagone Française and Tres España as well, but Anne of Austria is here and she will have some influence on Hexagone Française’s chancellor and she has not had any connection to K.P.A. Italia in recent times. They should be able to move the negotiations along if they use the Sack of Magdeburg as a bargaining chip. I expect that is why Mazarin is here. And with Luther here too, they can make sure M.H.R.R.’s own Protestants don’t catch them off guard. That’s more than

enough reason to come here.”

And...

“Whatever the situation and whatever the result, they need to regroup after a battle. That gives them a reason to send an ambassador whether they win or lose.”

“Who do you think it will be?”

“You would know the political connections better than me.”

“True,” she muttered and took a bite of her bread.

...There's a lot to like about finding a new flavor you like.

“Let's try thinking about a number of things related to the situation. And we also need to know about the progress and conclusion of the Seto Inland Sea battle.”

The wind blew like a storm.

Some land floating in midair had a large piece torn off on the eastern edge and the surrounding ocean was scattering into the sky.

The temperature difference in the air caused by the explosions, the dust, and the seawater filled the dimly-lit sky with steam and wind.

That dark sky was a swirl of scarlet and black. The sky sank into the colors of evening beyond the storm of dust and mist, but wind and dust slammed against the floating island. On the island's eastern surface, almost everything had collapsed and entire groups of trees were torn up, revealing bare rock below.

The eastern coast looked like it had been roughly carved into and the scarlet storm continued blowing its foundation out into the air.

And on that eastern coast, a figure in a white and black uniform stood above the stormy ocean that was being pulled out into the sky to fall. The figure stood next to a great torii that had tilted.

“Galileo! You're all right, aren't you!?”

“You have a bad habit of assuming things are all right, former boy.”

Papa-Schola Innocentius laughed and held his arms out to the sides.

Cornice firma appeared there to inform him of Itsukushima's situation. Almost the entire display was dyed red and a portion was painted the white of "unknown". The red continued to grow while graphs and numbers never stopped appearing to inform of the damage to different areas.

However, he kept his eyes pointed forward.

Similarly, Galileo kept his eyes on the sky.

The wind blew and dust slammed into them as their surroundings blew about.

Suddenly, a distant rumble reached them. It was the sound of something breaking and small fragments continuing to fall away. It was accompanied by the ground shaking and the entirety of the falling ocean jumping up and turning to spray.

"I suppose the southeast side just fell," said Galileo.

Innocentius did not bother turning around.

"Can you hear it, Galileo?"

"What is it? Give me a precise answer, former boy."

"I hear an aerial ship."

"As do I, former boy. And this is not one of those iron-clad ships. It is much bigger. This means something even larger has arrived in this stormy sky."

"Testament," agreed Innocentius. "Luckily, the acceleration pathway is still seventy percent active. If we use the secondary pathway, we can fire on it as soon as it appears."

"Would this be the Shirasagi, Hashiba's second wave that was supposed to arrive after the iron-clad ships?"

"I don't know, but either way, they won't be able to see us right away while we *can* see. That means..."

Innocentius trailed off as the sky suddenly grew dark.

The swirl of scarlet and black was pushed outward by something on the other side. Something massive. From their perspective, the entire sky seemed to grow

and swell out.

“It’s here!”

Innocentius fired a bullet from the Itsukushima acceleration cannon.

The acceleration pathway had the same entrance and exit for the bullet. The bullet sent through the great torii was made from the defense barriers opened between Innocentius’s outstretched hands.

They were meant to deflect an enemy’s attacks, so they could not be broken without an opposing spell, a divine weapon, or overwhelming force. He opened them between his hands and used a compression spell to combine them into a single object.

The number was based on the seven virtues, so it was seven to the seventh power or 823,543 barriers. The divine protection of that number imbued each individual barrier with the seven virtues which further raised their defensive power.

After compressing them into a fist-sized ball of light, he threw it into the acceleration pathway where it raced through the center of the torii-style cross acceleration spells surrounding Itsukushima. At its initial speed, it looked like it was going to fall, but it began to float up more and more and the torii seemed to knock it up to greater and greater speeds.

“My modifications are going well, former boy!”

A massive model of the solar system set across Itsukushima began to move when Galileo used his control spell. The accuracy of each planet’s rotation, revolution, and trajectory was transferred to the bullet from the nine ten-meter planetary models.

Ultimately, the bullet received the divine protection of the seven virtues as well as the planetary movement and speed.

And...

“Here it comes!”

The clouds split apart and it arrived.

Innocentius saw a great shadow within the storm.

The massive shadow arrived wrapped in swirling scarlet and black. He removed Stithos Porneia from his back and raised it toward the shadow.

...If it comes close enough, I can disarm it with Stithos Porneia.

And at a distance, not even a large ship could do any real damage to Itsukushima. At most it could destroy the surface city, but that city had already been swept away. So...

“If it comes to a shootout, we’ll win. Hm!?”

As soon as he said that, the shot was fired from the acceleration pathway. It blew away the ocean, tore into the ocean floor, and flew in a straight line toward the front of the shadow.

As it went, the clouds split directly above the storm. The air pushed forward by the shadow had produced a disturbance in the storm.

Some scarlet light of evening shined in on the bow of the arriving shadow.

When Innocentius saw what was there, he and Galileo opened their eyes in surprise.

Galileo commented on the ship arriving with a rumbling that tore through the sky and storm.

“That is not the Shirasagi, former boy!”

It was...

“Damn you!!” shouted Innocentius. “Do you think your rule has already begun!?”

At the same time, there was an impact and a great roar.

And once more, Itsukushima was swallowed up by darkness.

A massive and powerful shadow robbed K.P.A. Italia of all light.

“A runaway ley line reactor?”

As the colors of evening filled the sky, Sakai lay on a bench set up on the academy roof located up in that sky.

His question was directed toward “Musashi” who stood to his right.

She currently held a long ladle for a large pot.

“Judge. We only just detected it. This information is known only by a few of the automatons and you. ‘Musashino’ went to inform Musashi King Yoshinao and... he now knows. Over.”

“What a pain,” muttered Sakai before realizing something. “You said you detected this, didn’t you?”

“Judge. Well done noticing, Sakai-sama. We can do quite a lot if we try. We detected something similar to the noise detected at Mikawa. Based on a comparison, this is weaker, but it is undoubtedly the pattern of a ley line reactor explosion. Over.”

“I see.”

Sakai pulled his pipe from his pocket, so “Musashi” snapped a disposable spark charm between her fingertips and held it out toward the pipe.

“Judge. Thanks. You sure are kind, ‘Musashi’-san.”

“Statistically, the situation is quite serious if you pull out your pipe while thinking. Are you worried about the Pope-Chancellor? Over.”

“I’m really not sure how to answer a question like that. ...Oh, sorry. Were you trying to be considerate?”

“No, an emotionless automaton cannot be ‘considerate’, so you must be imagining things. However, if we made no mistake in our detection, this is the truth. Over.”

He took the lit pipe and held it in his mouth.

“How is K.P.A. Italia doing?”

Suddenly...

“Here it comes. Over.”

A ripple-like current of air arrived from behind them in the south.

The sky was dyed in the colors of evening, but all of the thin clouds had vanished. Instead...

“The southern sky...”

Dark clouds welled up beyond a distant line of mountains.

Sakai and “Musashi” looked south where black clouds were appearing and spreading out.

They resembled a summer cumulonimbus cloud, but they were thin as they rose, caught on the “ceiling” of the sky, spread out, and fell back down.

A rumbling much like distant thunder continued on and on.

The academy and storm barriers on the back of the ships prevented the people from immediately seeing what was happening in the south. They only noticed the rumbling and the movement of the wind.

“...?”

A stir ran through them as if they were simply worried about the weather. As he listened, Sakai blew smoke out the corner of his mouth.

“Now, then. ‘Musashi’-san, what would you say if someone asked you what that is?”

“Automatons cannot lie. Over.”

“You sure are strict.”

“In what way? Over.”

“You’re saying Yoshinao-san or I have to order you not to tell if we want this hidden.”

“Musashi” tilted her head.

“But only I and a few others know about this. Over.”

Sakai nodded.

“Yeah. So I think I’ll just rest here for a while.”

“Judge. I will bring a tea set, so please relax. I have determined remaining silent

would be for the best, Sakai-sama. There is no reason to worry the people when there is nothing they can do about it. We can wait until word arrives when we depart next. Over.”

“This is a lot of extra trouble, isn’t it?” said Sakai. “What about at Magdeburg?”

“Asama-sama is in charge of the divine transmissions, so I sent a coded divine transmission to her from the Asama Shrine. It seems Masazumi-sama and Neshinbara-sama will make the decision.”

“Makes sense. Well, this information will get out sooner or later, so there’s no real point in hiding it. We could even flaunt our own ability by showing we got wind of this before anyone else. Of course...”

He removed the pipe from his mouth, rested his head on a hand, and stared into the southern sky.

“That kind of trick wouldn’t have any effect on Old Luther, but maybe she would find it charming.”

“Sakai-sama, do you know Luther-sama?”

He nodded and pointed to the south.

“When I fought the idiot inside that thundercloud, I passed through here to reach the Seto Inland Sea.”

“I got help from quite a few people.”

Sakai smiled bitterly, but kept his eyes on the southern sky.

“Y’know what?”

“Judge. What is it? Over.”

“Judge. Well, a lot happened in the past,” he began. “When I fought that idiot, I would’ve been caught by K.P.A. Italia’s guard network if I’d gone straight there via Osaka, so I pretended to be on my way to Edo and Yoshitsune helped me head north. Yoshitsune hates – or rather is too focused on – Old Tomoe...that is, Old Luther, so I had the Satou Brothers talk to her about it. After that, I travelled

from M.H.R.R. to the Seto Inland Sea. Old Man Matsunaga supported me and Innocen was out in the Osaka region for an interpretation of the Crusades, so I traveled south and attacked from behind.”

Sakai demonstrated the respective locations with hand gestures and he realized “Musashi” was looking his way.

“Oh? What is it, ‘Musashi’-san? Why are you staring at me?”

“This is the first time I have seen you enjoying yourself so much while talking about the past. Over.”

“There wasn’t anything enjoyable about it. It was a hell of a lot of work.”

“I have statistically determined that work put into victory provides a sense of fulfillment. Anyway, I hope the Pope-Chancellor and the others are unhurt. And... do you have a moment? Over.”

“Do you have a question?”

“Judge.”

“Musashi” nodded, used her gravitational control to pull a movable table over from the rooftop entrance, and asked her question.

“You said you attacked the Pope-Chancellor from behind in Osaka, correct? Then during that time...no, and during the later battle, where were you hiding? Matsunaga-sama’s headquarters are Kii, south of Osaka, so it would be impossible to attack from there. Also, K.P.A. Italia would have noticed if you were anywhere along the coast of the Seto Inland Sea. Where exactly where you hidden, Sakai-sama? Over.”

“Well.” Sakai smiled bitterly and pointed his pipe southward. “Perhaps they’ll visit Magdeburg. ...No, M.H.R.R.’s ambassador should already be on the way there right now. No one knows what’s going to happen at the moment, so it’s the perfect timing for someone who does know.”

“What do you mean? Is your former protector now working for M.H.R.R.? ...To be honest, I am having difficulty understanding.”

“You’ll get it soon enough. Based on what Asama-kun said, they’ll be there. I sent Masazumi-kun a divine mail earlier, so it’s probably about time to greet

them.”

So...

“Masazumi-kun is going to have to work hard here.”

The first in Magdeburg to notice the shadow were the ones surrounding the walled city.

This shadow was not caused by the dark clouds rising in the south. It was the shadow of an aerial ship arriving from the southwest.

Word of the approaching ship quickly passed through the tents bearing the flag of M.H.R.R. When the PR Committee sent a report to Narimasa and Katsuie, who were cooking the fish they had caught in the Elbe River, they understood just what it meant.

M.H.R.R.’s ambassador had arrived in Magdeburg.

“I see.”

Katsuie shoved an entire fish into his mouth and pulled it from the skewer.

“So the ambassador’s here. I’m sure he’ll advise Magdeburg to surrender, but the question is what he does afterwards. ...Well, I’m sure Magdeburg just wants to buy some time with it.”

“But!” shouted Narimasa.

He was already standing and clenching his fists and teeth. He glared up at the ambassador’s ship arriving from the dark, cloudy southern sky.

“Fine then,” sighed Katsuie when he saw his underclassman’s reaction. “Calm down, small fry. Sending an ambassador at times like this is something like an international rule.”

“Dammit!”

Narimasa took a breath and kicked a stone from the riverbank.

“This is obviously nothing but a farce! Our master understands the situation, doesn’t he!?”

“Our master would have him do it regardless and that old man would do it regardless. Our master hopes for a great many possibilities and that old man... well, he just wants to cause trouble.”

So...

“Narimasa, you need to restrain yourself better. You’ll be after his head eventually anyway.”

“But! You understand, don’t you!? That old man’s not the only one on that ship! There’s someone even worse on there!”

Narimasa pointed toward the giant ship rapidly approaching from overhead.

“Look! That’s the Shigisan, the main ship of our ambassador, Matsunaga!”

He turned toward Katsuie with his eyebrows raised.

“Don’t you know who Old Man Matsunaga worked with when he supported Sakai Tadatsugu, leading to the Pope-Chancellor’s defeat!? That same situation is happening again!”

“When that old man starts his second rebellion, the two of us just have to defeat him. He may be damn good at running, but finishing things here isn’t too bad an idea.”

The wind blew overhead as the Hiragumo-style Aerial Ship Shigisan slowly descended. It almost looked like a metal lid being placed on Magdeburg.

At 5:30 PM, Masazumi and the other national representatives greeted the visitors in front of the Cathedral of Magdeburg.

Mazarin and Anne on the Palais-Cardinal’s shoulder represented Hexagone Française while Guericke and Tomoe Gozen represented the M.H.R.R. Protestants.

They were greeting two guests.

One was Matsunaga Hisahide, lord of Shigisan Castle. He looked to Masazumi and spoke.

“Hey there, crossdressing girl. Is that naked boy not with you? Has he not

made it back after falling off?”

...We all know you know the answer.

Masazumi started to shake her head, but the old man suddenly said more.

“Is he on his way to Rudolf II’s place to pursue the mystery of the Princess Disappearances?”

“Eh?”

Her confusion escaped her mouth.

...Could that mean he knows what the Princess Disappearances are?

Matsunaga laughed.

“Ha ha. I heard about it from Yoshitsune. I’ve been investigating it some myself.”

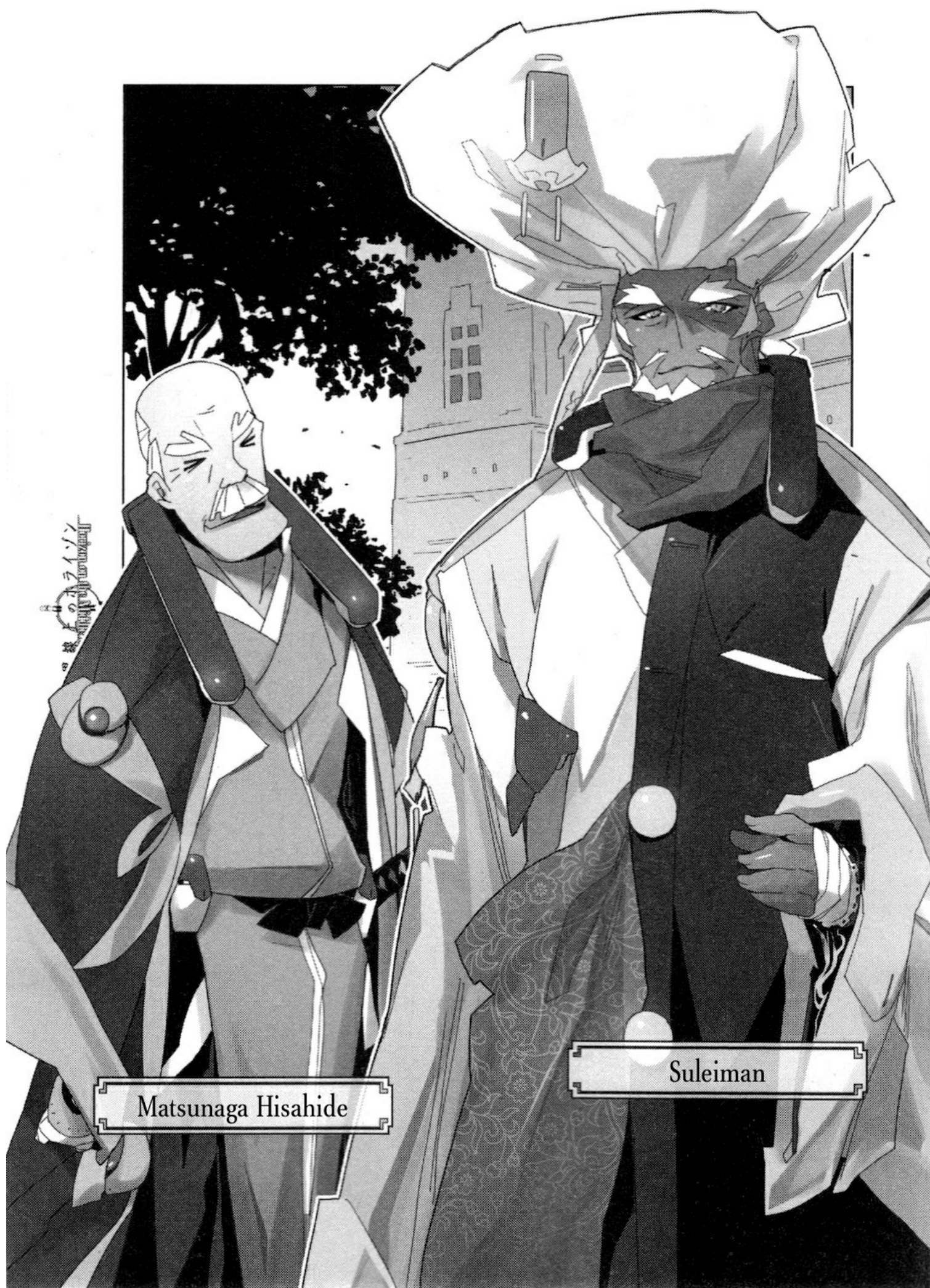
“Really?”

“Most any academy leader will have been gathering information on it. That’s just how abnormal a situation it is. ...You, little transparent girl up there. Your Richelieu was taken, wasn’t he?”

“So it seems. I was never too fond of him. Still, he was skilled and he always gave me treats, so it is a shame.”

“How nice.”

Matsunaga smiled and suddenly took a step to the side, revealing the other guest.



Matsunaga Hisahide

Suleiman

It was an elderly man wearing a Far Eastern uniform made to resemble a monk's robe. However, he had the dark skin of a Middle-Easterner and his back was straight and unwavering. His shoulder width was a bit small for his great height, but his thick eyebrows faced Masazumi below his huge turban.

"A pleasure to meet you."

His voice was low and deep. When he noticed everyone except for her and Tomoe stirring, he narrowed his eyes and said more.

"Do not worry. I have already retired. Musashi Vice Chancellor, I assume you have heard about me from Sakai."

"Judge. I have. You are Honganji Kenryo, monk and leader of the Ikkou-Shu. Or..."

"Could you use my old name? The name Nobunaga stripped me of."

"Judge." Masazumi nodded. "Lord Suleiman, former chancellor of the Ottoman Turks."

Masazumi placed a hand on her chest and gave a light bow.

"I would like to convey Principal Sakai's thanks for supporting him with the Mlasi forces on the Seto Inland Sea's islands and the African region of northern Kyushu."

"And what did he say?"

"Judge."

Masazumi raised her head and nodded. She held out her right hand, displayed the divine text from Sakai, and held the hand straight out toward the man.

She then spoke the words Sakai had sent.

" 'That guy will give you anything you ask, so take him for everything he's worth.' "

After a pause, Suleiman held a hand to his face and laughed.

"Ha ha. Honestly, that boy. That really takes me back to my younger days."

With that comment, he took Masazumi's hand. His hand was hard and covered in scars. The surface felt cold, but there was a great strength within.

"Judge. The man who built the world's largest empire, the Ottoman Turks, is now a cynical and stingy old man. But that is why I'm looking forward to seeing what the current generation of youths will show me."

He glanced toward Tomoe and formed a bitter smile.

"It's time for our meeting. There is much to discuss."

Chapter 61: Leaders Under Siege

CHAPTER 61

"Leaders Under Siege"



What begins quietly
And definitely?

Point Allocation (Expectations)

What begins quietly

And definitely?

Point Allocation (Expectations)

The evening light shined through a room's window.

It was a classroom.

The lights had already been turned on and a short female teacher with "Sanyou" on her nametag stood in front of the blackboard. She drew a quick map of the Far East from Kinki to Chugoku and tapped her fist on the northern coast.

"Now, the Musashi is currently in northern M.H.R.R. where it borders Holland."

She tapped on the northern coast again and rotated her hand to point toward the Chugoku region.

"This is M.H.R.R. As we covered last class, Charlemagne unified Europe during the 8th to 9th centuries to create the Carolingian Empire. Its headquarters were here in M.H.R.R. where he is known as Karl the Great. But..."

...This is where it gets tricky.

With that thought, Sanyou wrote "Carolingian Empire" on the blackboard.

"The empire created by Charlemagne was not known as the Holy Roman Empire. The emperor was crowned by the Pope of Western Rome and Charlemagne was known as the Roman Emperor, but at the time Rome was split between papal Western Rome and imperial Eastern Rome. The Eastern Roman Empire had a Roman Emperor of their own, so they referred to the coronation as a usurpation of the imperial throne."

But due to Charlemagne's great deeds, he was later known as a hero.

His story had been told again and again as a revival and he was seen as "everyone's father" in Europe. In the age of the knights, everyone had tried to give themselves some importance by claiming he was their ancestor. That had

given rise to the saying “No matter what happens, your old man is Karl”.^[1]

...Recently, they used New World corn to make a snack based on it. It's advertised with Old Man Karl, isn't it?

“But...”

While thinking emotionally on it all, Sanyou wrote the year 962 on the board.

“962 was an important year.”

“Are you listening?” asked Sanyou. “In 962, the Carolingian Empire had already split and the Kingdom of the East Franks, which would later become M.H.R.R., finally produced an individual powerful enough to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor. That individual was Otto I. He was the head of Magdeburg and was buried in Magdeburg's Maurice Cathedral.”

...But Otto I had to work hard before becoming emperor.

He had first become king of the East Franks, but he had found himself constantly fighting rebellious princes and his brothers.

He was betrayed by his mother and younger brother, made allies of enemies, and unified the Kingdom of the East Franks. After reconciling with his brother, his heir betrayed him and he conquered Italy.

His sworn friend Conrad agreed with his heir's betrayal and became yet another enemy, but Otto fought them with the help of his younger brother.

Afterwards, rebels attacked the Pope in Italy, putting Otto in a dangerous position; but Conrad, who had previously betrayed Otto, rushed in and achieved victory with his own death. That achievement earned Otto I the position of Holy Roman Emperor, but...

...This is where chivalry comes in.

Manga and the like would always reach their climax here.

...Come to think of it, Otto I must have been doing something wrong to be betrayed that often!

Sanyou sighed and tapped on the drawn map.

“Anyway, with Otto I as emperor, M.H.R.R. was born; but it took a long time to make the throne more established. The Pope held the right to crown the emperor, so the Holy Roman Empire could not set up an emperor to rule themselves. So to ensure they had an actual leader, the princes of each principality were given the right to vote for a ‘King of Germany’ instead of an emperor. This eventually fell apart and the princes were too busy holding each other in check to elect a king. This was known as the Great Interregnum and...”

Sanyou hesitated but continued.

“Emperor became a powerless position that was nothing more than a title.”

Everyone in the classroom stopped moving.

A lot of students and families on the Musashi had come from M.H.R.R., so they had a real connection to all this. Even if this kind of topic was difficult, this silence still scared Sanyou.

She decided to continue on and wondered if she was gradually getting used to Musashi’s way of doing things.

...Eh? But isn’t that a bad thing?

“Teacher! Teacher! Did something happen!? Why aren’t you moving!? Is it about marriage again!?”

...What do you mean “again”?

At any rate, she breathed in and recovered.

“Now then,” she began. “Ironically, the Pope stopped insisting on choosing the emperor once the position lost its power. And in the 15th century, M.H.R.R. used its own right to crown an emperor. Starting then, the throne was effectively passed down by the Habsburg family.”

Some students took notes, but others nodded to say they already knew that. The ones that shrugged were ones from M.H.R.R. who had ended up in the Far East due to all that confusion.

...M.H.R.R. went through a lot, didn’t it?

Sanyou wrote M.H.R.R.'s current lineup on the board.

Chancellor: Rudolf II – “Wahnsinniger”. Was imprisoned in Prague but moved near Magdeburg.

Student Council President: Matthias – Rudolf II's younger brother and the one who imprisoned him. Logismoi Óplo user.

Vice Chancellor: Shibata Katsuie – P.A. Oda's vice chancellor. Double inherited name with General Tilly. Testamenta Arma user.

Vice President: Hashiba Toukichirou – One of P.A. Oda's Five Great Peaks and Six Heavenly Demon Armies. Details are unknown.

Secretary: Luther – A ghost and Tomoe Gozen. Parent of the Reformation and Protestant ideology.

Treasurer: Maeda Toshiie – One of P.A. Oda's Five Great Peaks and Six Heavenly Demon Armies. A ghost.

“That's pretty much it, but there is a reason why M.H.R.R. is working with the Mlasi P.A. Oda despite being religious enemies. The Peace of Westphalia that Musashi will be a part of marks the end of the Thirty Years' War, but it also means M.H.R.R.'s defeat.”

That defeat was not a kind one either.

“The Peace of Westphalia is called the world's first international treaty, so defeat there is not just decided between two nations. It is internationally decided and enforced.”

Their defeat was recognized by the entire world. Their influence would drop among every nation and recovering would be no easy task.

“That is why M.H.R.R. Student Council President Matthias is trying to fight against that fate. Hashiba responded by having her troops drop the Mlasi religion and take on Catholicism in its place. And in accordance with history, the two of them imprisoned Rudolf II, a “Wahnsinniger” or madman who enjoyed his imperial fantasies and refused to look at reality. Because Rudolf II has no power, they partially hold the imperial throne already.”

Sanyou looked to the evening sky out the window.

“But to put it another way, their Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers will use any means necessary. Given Musashi’s and our plans, that is something we cannot afford to forget.”

At that point, Sanyou looked out the window again.

She could see dark clouds spreading out far too the south. And below them...

“Magdeburg. I hope Vice President Honda and the others are doing a proper job.”

The space was filled with night and the color green.

It was a vast and flat field and a forest separated by a perfectly straight border. A small straight stream ran through it all, too. This world had no ups or downs.

“This is Avalon, isn’t it?”

Masazumi muttered to herself as she and Asama looked around.

Guericke walked past her. He stepped ahead of the others and spread his arms to indicate their surroundings.

“This was recreated based on the documents sent by England. And...”

He pointed to one corner of Avalon.

...Stonehenge?

Stonehenge was the massive stone structure that acted as a controller for England’s ley lines. What Masazumi saw before her resembled the circles and lines of stones that formed Stonehenge, but these were thin panels that shined with a white light.

Asama narrowed her false left eye and stared at the light.

“That is amazingly dense ether.”

“Testament.” Guericke nodded. “Those are the Hemispheres I mentioned as a barrier against the Apocalypse. We tested the strength of a number of shapes and settled on a non-hemispherical one, but I would prefer it if you let that slide.”

He nodded, crossed his arms, and opened his mouth to provide an explanation; but before he could, Mazarin held up the *signe cadre* displaying Anne.

“Let us go visit the henge, Lady Anne.”

Being ignored left Guericke speechless and the others gave him sympathetic looks.

...This feels surprisingly similar to our environment.

After Masazumi and Asama nodded, Suleiman approached. He too walked over to the henge, but he then turned back toward Guericke.

“Do you have a pamphlet or something on that Apocalypse barrier?”

“I do.”

When Guericke reached into his pocket and pulled out a stack of folded papers and packs of pocket tissues, everyone else took a disturbed step back.

...Germans sure are amazing.

Half in awe, Masazumi took a pamphlet along with Suleiman and the others. Afterwards, Guericke pointed to the source of the stream. A device resembling a four meter pot lid was located there.

A movable pedestal was placed on the bottom of the machine.

“That is the emitter for the Hemispheres.”

He gestured toward the emitter and looked to Masazumi.

“When the Musashi returns, we will transfer it over.”

Masazumi had not expected that.

During the meeting Horizon had attended the night before, they had agreed to a joint development of the Hemispheres, but...

“Why are you giving it to us?”

The one who nodded in response was Tomoe who stood next to Guericke.

She shrugged.

“We don’t know how the Sack of Magdeburg will play out, but we know the city will not escape unharmed. That opens the possibility of the Catholics or P.A. Oda stealing the Hemispheres. More importantly, we will be unable to research the Hemispheres in the same environment once the city is reconstructed. So...”

She looked Masazumi right in the eye.

“So you will take the Hemispheres with you while Guericke and the others here will contact the Musashi for a more theoretical development or the creation of a new prototype.”

“Testament.”

Guericke nodded, so he must have already discussed this with Protestant Representative Tomoe.

“In that case,” said Masazumi. “Thank you very much. We will do our best to ensure this leads to the results we both want.”

“Testament. We are thankful that you will take it. With P.A. Oda’s Genesis Project and your Logismoí Óplo, there are indeed methods of stopping the Apocalypse. While our Hemispheres are not enough, I hope they can help you even a little as you work to stop it in your own way.”

Guericke held the pamphlets up toward the others.

“There are more than just bad things in this world. With the Genesis Project and the Logismoí Óplo, we wish to investigate any positive means of fighting the coming Apocalypse. I want everyone attending this meeting to feel the same.”

“If our treasurer heard that, he would probably get into an argument over how exactly to investigate that. And I guess that’s one way of doing it.”

With that comment, Masazumi looked forward.

They were making their way to the center of the henge created by the Hemisphere barrier.

She and Asama entered the ring of light and looked around. In there, Guericke, Tomoe, Mazarin who held up a *signe cadre* displaying Anne, Suleiman, Matsunaga, Asama, and she could all see each other.

Realizing that was why they were using this spot for their meeting, Masazumi

was the first to sit down.

“Okay.”

Asama also sat and Masazumi looked up at all the others.

“I would appreciate it if we could call this an official meeting, but at any rate, I want to speak. Is that okay?”

Masazumi felt the pointy grass gently scraping and tickling at her butt and legs.

She interpreted the feeling as her calm rather than her impatience, so she settled her hips down even further.

As the others looked down at her, she spoke.

“Should I say why Musashi is taking part in this meeting?”

“You should,” said Suleiman with a nod.

The others also nodded and Matsunaga cut in with a bitter smile.

“To be honest, I just want to hear what an irregular participant like you has to say. If we only gathered the usual members, we’d all know what everyone was going to say. So it’s fine with me if you say as much as you want.”

“Thank you,” replied Masazumi.

She turned to Asama and had the girl begin recording.

“Now, let me be blunt.”

She looked across the others who were still standing.

“We want allies. That’s as simply as I can put it.”

“Oh? Is that the will of Musashi’s princess? Hm?” asked Suleiman.

“Judge.” Masazumi nodded. “I want you to view that as the will of everyone from Musashi, myself included.”

Even she was unsure of what she was saying. After all, Musashi had only been able to fight defensively against Hexagone Française and they had only just barely defended Musashino’s bridge against some of P.A. Oda’s main fighters.

A lot of Musashi's citizens probably wanted to save the world from the Apocalypse but also wanted to avoid any fighting.

Neshinbara would be helping with that by not participating in the meeting and acting as a spokesman to the normal citizens, but...

...Any result besides victory will definitely drive us into a corner.

So at the very least, there was one thing she wanted from this meeting.

"Let me say it again: Musashi wants to gain some allies."

Still sitting, Masazumi looked to the space directly ahead of her. She opened her mouth and began to speak.

"At this point, I have finally understood something as fact rather than mere knowledge. We caused trouble at Mikawa and we helped make history in England, but England, Tres España, Hexagone Française, M.H.R.R., K.P.A. Italia, Qing-Takeda, and probably Sviet Rus, P.A. Oda, and the other nations we have yet to see have all been doing this all along as if it were normal. It was just that the Far East's history recreation was closely controlled by the provisional rule, so the other nations kept our history moving without us having to do anything. That was all it was."

So, she thought.

"The other nations were not just fighting for some advantageous conclusion with the strength they happened to have. They are constantly fighting to strengthen their rule and to gain an advantageous position against the other nations and they have constantly been gathering power to accomplish that. They were using their own strength and their own will to choose what they were doing."

"What about it?" asked Suleiman who was still standing.

Masazumi nodded without looking up at him.

"From now on, we too will continue growing stronger while constantly choosing the path of warfare."

"Will you make yourselves our enemy?"

“That’s hard to say,” she began. “We will fight back if anyone tries to conquer us through battle or appeasement. That is why I want to send Musashi out into the world at large as soon as possible. We will not simply take part in a piece of history as we did in England. I want us to always exist and move history as a presence equivalent to the other nations. And to do that...”

Masazumi returned to her main point.

“I want allies. That is why Musashi is taking part in this secret meeting. Now, what do your nations and world powers want from Musashi in this anti-P.A. Oda and anti-Catholic meeting?”

Dragon Dog: “Is that crossdressing girl stupid? This is where you’re supposed to make powerful demands and win big if it looks like the other party will accept. I have determined the best plan here would be to play the role of the squeaky wheel like that.”

ANA: “If a small nation tried that, they would just be attacked twice as hard. And against a nation they could look down on, that’s no different from saying ‘I could always take it from you by force, but I’ll let you off easy and accept it in exchange for not attacking’. It wouldn’t work when other nations are present because it requires taking on a different attitude with each separate nation. Doing that here would fill the related nations with hostility and leave you surroun-ah.”

Dragon Dog: “What is it, Lady Anne?”

ANA: “Sorry, sorry. You were getting me worked up in a positive way, weren’t you? Sorry for getting carried away and lecturing you.”

Dragon Dog: “No, I was relieved to find you can still speak like you used to. As Luynes and Mazarin, I will allow you to fully take part in this meeting and I will fully support you. But...”

ANA: “Testament. But what?”

Dragon Dog: “Then why did Musashi’s vice president reveal her hand and ask for help?”

ANA: “Testament. I love how much like old times this is. ...To answer your question, that is because this is a secret meeting with almost no time for preparation. I’m sure you know, but before a meeting between nations, the ambassadors of the nations involved will contact each other, lay the groundwork for the meeting by exchanging information on what they will be discussing and what result they want, and lower the odds of wasted time or a breakdown in negotiations.”

Dragon Dog: “In other words, an actual meeting is preferably just a place to double-check everything, correct?”

ANA: “Testament. For Musashi, that is done by the adults on the Provisional Council and the various committees, but Musashi is currently at odds with the Testament Union nations and can’t properly lay that groundwork. Without that groundwork, she must make their view known at the negotiation table itself. Her confrontation with the Pope-Chancellor and her meeting at England were the same, remember? But...”

Dragon Dog: “This meeting really does have no groundwork, so she decided she wouldn’t make any progress without revealing her hand, didn’t she?”

ANA: “Precisely. She chose to make progress instead of wasting time vying for the best possible deal. This is dangerous. She will cut down any incomplete idea that's given just for show. The kind of plotting used with a proper groundwork won’t work here. Luynes...no, here you would be Mazarin. Sit down, Mazarin. If we don’t say what we have to say, we won’t be able to keep up with this discussion.”

“Hm.”

Suleiman quickly finished thinking and sat down.

Guericke and Tomoe soon did the same, and...

“It is unfortunate everything is covered in grass.”

Mazarin sat down while holding up the *signe cadre* that displayed Anne.

Once they all turned to Musashi’s vice president, Tomoe opened her mouth.

“I see,” she began. “While this meeting will still be about our financial and history recreation plans to oppose P.A. Oda, I would first like to discuss the more urgent issue related to the actions of our sudden guest Musashi.”

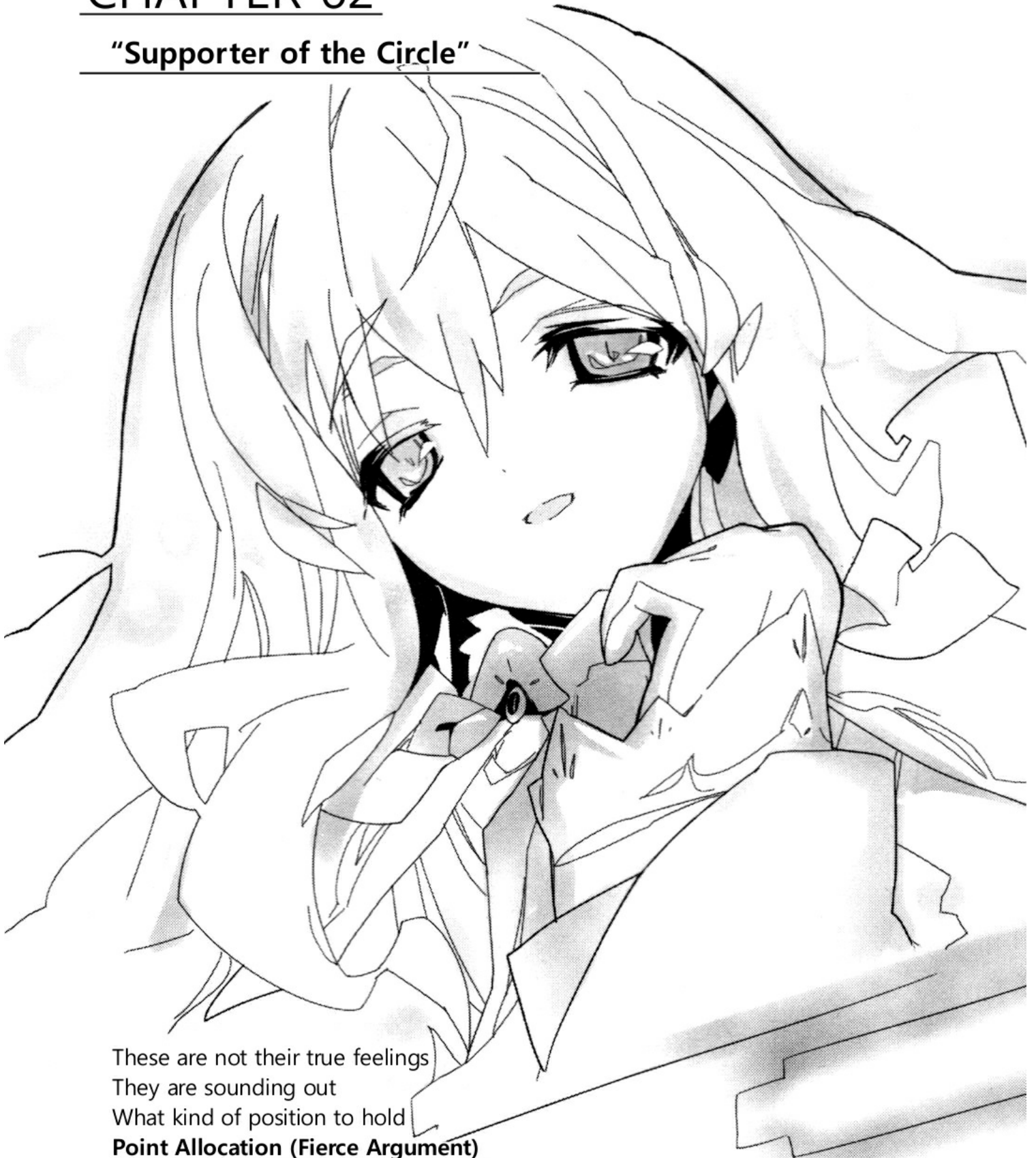
Everyone nodded in agreement and Tomoe spoke to Musashi’s vice president who everyone was watching.

“Will Musashi be our ally or our enemy in your opposition of P.A. Oda. That is what I would like to know.”

Chapter 62: Supporter of the Circle

CHAPTER 62

"Supporter of the Circle"



These are not their true feelings
They are sounding out
What kind of position to hold
Point Allocation (Fierce Argument)

These are not their true feelings

They are sounding out

What kind of position to hold

Point Allocation (Fierce Argument)

Darkness hung in the sky of Avalon during the day.

The individuals sitting there were the representatives of different forces which could be described as anti-P.A. Oda. As they took a quick break, they adjusted their sign frames and the like for the meeting.

Masazumi sat among them yet had a thought as she looked around.

...They want to know if we will be their ally or their enemy in their opposition of P.A. Oda, do they?

That answer carried an implied promise and it would determine whether they could benefit from each other, so Masazumi first asked a classmate a question.

Vice President: “Neshinbara, do you have anything to tell me about the representatives here?”

Novice: “You go first since you know more about politics than me.”

“Judge,” she sent before glancing over at Asama.

Vice President: “I’m a slow typer, so can Tsukinowa help me?”

Asama: “It requires an additional feature, but that doesn’t matter to you since Heidi and Shirojiro will be paying, right? I’ll add the ability to form text using the movement of your tongue and throat, okay? ...There.”

This sure is a convenient age we live in, thought Masazumi as she formed the words in her mouth.

Vice President: “Ih ish ood?”

Wise Sister: “Oh, dear. She’s turned into a moron! Excellent!!”

Asama: “Oops, I’ll up the conversion interference rate. There you go.”

Fine, then, she thought before repeating herself: Is this good?

Vice President: “Is this manner of speech up to thy standards?”

Asama: “Oops, that’s too much interference. I’ll lower it a bit.”

This sure is an inconvenient age we live in, she thought while glaring at Asama, but Hanami did a dance to distract her.

“Anyway,” said Masazumi under her breath. *This should be about right.*”

Vice President: “I’ll point out what the meeting participants want, my predictions of what they will do, and the problems they bring.”

- Anne of Austria (Hexagone Française)

Wants stability for Hexagone Française and Louis XIV’s rule.

Sees Mouri’s submission to Hashiba and defeat at the Battle of Sekigahara as a problem.

- Luther Tomoe Gozen (M.H.R.R. Protestants)

Wants to oppose the M.H.R.R. Catholics?

- Suleiman (Mlasi Forces?)

Revenge against P.A. Oda?

- Matsunaga Hisahide (P.A. Oda)

Unknown.

Mal-Ga: “Why they’re here is a mystery for most of them, isn’t it? Well, I guess that’s why you have to ask.”

Wise Sister: “Do you win by revealing your answer before them or after them? Which is it?”

Novice: “That’s a difficult question. And I would add these to your list.”

- Anne of Austria (Hexagone Française)

The future of Hexagone Française will be greatly affected by the result of the battle between K.P.A. Italia and M.H.R.R.

- Luther Tomoe Gozen (M.H.R.R. Protestants)

Even if they overcome the Catholics, Hashiba remains, so they cannot escape P.A. Oda's rule.

- Suleiman (Mlasi Forces?)

His connections with the Mlasi majority faction and Buddhism are important.

- Matsunaga Hisahide (P.A. Oda)

He's a trickster, so I want to guide him into holding an interest in us.

Mal-Ga: "That's quite the vague assistance there. This is worse than when I say 'roar around the curves and whoosh on through' to underclassmen asking for drawing lessons."

Novice: "How can you say I'm worse than that!?"

Tonbokiri: "I will ignore that, but what is the Mlasi 'majority faction'?"

Wise Sister: "Judge. The majority faction spins around and around while the minority faction loves the end of the world."

Bell: "Eh? Eh?"

That was actually kind of accurate sighed Masazumi.

Vice President: "Um, a long time ago, the bloodline of the Mlasi founder was lost during some internal conflict. The majority faction pragmatically tries to protect the teachings of the founder without fighting over who their leader is. The minority faction puts much more focus on bloodline and says a descendent of the founder will appear and save them all at the end of the world."

Novice: "Judge. Unlike the Tsrhc Catholics, Mlasi lacks an authority like an organized church to manage them and enforce the rules. They still have the teachings of their religion, but they can't definitively say which side is heretical. But anyway, the majority faction has a fair bit of mysticism to it and they have a lot of spells. Aoi Sister-kun was talking the Sufi spinning used to become one

with god.”

It's nice having people to help explain things, thought Masazumi.

...Oh, I get it.

She had classmates she could rely on, so she could do just that when she did not know something.

Vice President: “Neshinbara, what is the common point between all of these people?”

Novice: “Exactly what they told you: they see P.A. Oda as an enemy.”

Then, she thought. I need to say this if I want them as allies.

“Now, I would like to say one thing.”

She gently raised her right hand to signal the meeting was beginning again and she directed her words toward the others who were already waiting silently for her.

“To form a consensus, I would like to explain Musashi’s current situation.”

The subject of the meeting was what Musashi intended to do about P.A. Oda, but there was something she had to do before getting to that answer.

...I need to hold them back and see what happens to make sure I don't carelessly promise anything.

And so she spoke.

“Early this morning, Musashi was attacked by scouts from P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics and we fought them off with help from the M.H.R.R. Protestants.”

She breathed in and slowly spoke to the surrounding people.

“Due to that, Musashi currently holds a hostile stance toward P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics.”

“Hmm,” muttered Suleiman with a hand on his chin.

...This is a very Far Eastern way of playing with her words. She is treating P.A.

Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics as one and the same.

P.A. Oda was a massive nation encroaching on Europe and other nations, but the M.H.R.R. Catholics were only a single force within M.H.R.R. The nations of Europe viewed the M.H.R.R. Catholics as a P.A. Oda puppet.

For that reason, Suleiman had assumed the meeting would focus only on what they would do about P.A. Oda.

...But Musashi's vice president plans to drag M.H.R.R. into the spotlight too.

M.H.R.R. possessed a Logismoí Óplo, so Musashi may not have been able to ignore them.

Assuming they would be dealing with both the M.H.R.R. Catholics and P.A. Oda was a pain, but it held great meaning for the M.H.R.R. Protestants and Hexagone Française who were faced with the threat of Hashiba and the Catholics.

However...

"Hm."

I wonder, thought Suleiman as everyone gently focused on him.

...Using self-defense in her negotiation is also a very Far Eastern thing to do.

After all, Musashi's vice president had said their hostile stance against the M.H.R.R. Catholics and P.A. Oda was due to *the attack they received from scouts belonging to those two nations.*

That put the source of the hostility on P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R.

It also implied Musashi had not originally harbored any hostility toward them.

This was part of her negotiation.

She was saying they could reconcile with P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics if those here tried to force any unreasonable demands on Musashi.

How very Far Eastern, thought Suleiman. *She is cautious and she tries not to let go of any possibility, but she never forgets about the self-defense this all rests on. And it is even more Far Eastern to prioritize their own defense without maintaining a position that they are in the right.*

But, he thought.

...Should I test her? Not that it's a very nice thing to do.

He wanted to assess her skill, so he decided to give a simple test.

“Listen, Musashi Vice President. Are you saying you did not take up this hostility because you wanted to? Then are you also saying it is possible you could reconcile with P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics?”

If so...

“We will be forced to be wary of Musashi.”

When she heard what Suleiman said, Tomoe gave an impressed “Oh?” under her breath.

This man had been the Mlasi representative and the meeting spot froze over at his question.

But having a little tension is for the best, she thought while producing a Protestant lernen figur.

Lady AM:^[2] “Guericke, it looks like Mr. Suleiman is trying to earn the Protestants’ gratitude.”

Hemisphere Man: “Secretary, what do you mean by that?”

Lady AM: “I’m not telling.”

Guericke gave her a wide-eyed look, but she ignored him. *Human, never stop thinking. Your predecessor must help these people who have yet to grow, so be prepared to be kicked into the chasm.*

...Anyway, I see Suleiman is as haughty as ever.

After all, he had started out with “we”.

Who ever said we agreed with you? You are a heretic as far as we’re concerned.

But Suleiman was also working against the possibility of Musashi reconciling with not just P.A. Oda but the M.H.R.R. Catholics as well. The M.H.R.R. Protestants viewed both those groups as enemies, so they owed him one for that.

And there was a test in what he had said. He had asked Musashi if there was a possibility of them reconciling with P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R.

...Now, what answer will Musashi's vice president give?

If she said they would not, everyone here would have her word and they would use that to control Musashi as much as possible.

But if she said they might do so, everyone here would grow wary of Musashi.

Both options placed a great burden on Musashi.

Lady AM: "There is of course a way out of this."

Hemisphere Man: "What is that?"

Lady AM: "I'm not telling."

Guericke gave her a wide-eyed look, but she could safely ignore it if she viewed it as nothing but a humorous reaction. *Human, continue your pursuit of the performing arts.* At any rate, there was a way for Musashi to escape those two options.

...This will determine whether or not Musashi's vice president understands the meaning of what she wants.

The girl had tried to gain self-defense and opportunity, but she was now having her position tested.

What answer will she give? wondered Tomoe as she focused on Musashi's vice president.

Masazumi calmed her breathing as several gazes turned her way. She had a single thought in her head.

...You're giving me this right off the bat!?

This was a direct clash of intentions without time to lay any groundwork.

His words directly led to a demand and his question asked that she either confirm or deny.

Any answer she gave would be seen as a promise and follow her around in

everything else she did. It would affect both Musashi and the Far East as a whole.

She did feel some pressure here and she realized just how ridiculous a group she was facing here.

But...

...Calm down.

Asama: “C-calm down, Masazumi! And listen! Don’t calm down by making a weird joke! If you do that, this entire space could fall apart!”

Vice President: “But none of the jokes I’ve ever made have been ‘weird’.”

Mal-Ga: “Oh, sorry. I think I misheard you and spilled my ink. Could you rephrase that?”

Shut up.

At any rate, she was definitely being tested.

Was there a possibility of Musashi reconciling with P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R.? Suleiman insisted she gave a yes or no answer, but the real problem was which answer he wanted to hear.

“In other words, you want to confirm our attitude concerning P.A. Oda?”

“Shaja,” said Suleiman. “Musashi has declared it will end the Apocalypse and has formed a bond with England, so it looks like you are trying to provoke the Testament Union. But just as Mikawa was originally an intermediary between the Testament Union and P.A. Oda, the historical Matsudaira clan was allied with the Oda clan.”

So...

“It would be rather troublesome if you hid behind the history recreation, allied with or took a neutral stance toward P.A. Oda, and overlooked their invasion of Europe. Yes.”

I’m sure it would, thought Masazumi.

Matsudaira and P.A. Oda had not originally been enemies. From the perspective of the Testament Union members, the morning’s reconnaissance

attack could be taken as a warning to Musashi against forming bonds with the Testament Union.

...That must be why Suleiman is asking me to choose between the two options.

Were they P.A. Oda's enemy or their ally?

If she said they were their enemy, these other nations would use them. If she said they were their ally, these other nations would be wary of them. Was there a better answer?

Masazumi thought about what Suleiman had said and about the others here.

"..."

Then it came to her.

...There is one.

Masazumi realize there was an answer which was applicable specifically at this meeting.

...Is this...?

She thought and formed the words in her heart, so...

...Calm down.

Don't get excited.

Don't celebrate that you realized how to move this meeting along.

You don't need to celebrate what you've realized. You need to check to see if you're right.

"Are you listening?"

Masazumi breathed in and suppressed the joyous quivering of her throat.

"Hexagone Française."

She turned toward and directed her words toward Mazarin and Anne of Austria.

"If Musashi maintains a hostile stance toward P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R.

Catholics, what kind of support will your academy provide us?”

Matsunaga saw Suleiman lower his head to hide the smile on his lips, he saw the man’s shoulders shaking, and he heard suppressed laughter. Across from him, he saw one corner of Tomoe’s lips rise in a smile as she closed her eyes.

He nodded toward them and spoke.

“Looks like she’s turned you down.”

“Yes,” said Tomoe as Suleiman’s shoulders shook even harder. “Not bad.”

Exactly right, thought Matsunaga.

There was meaning behind the two options Suleiman had presented to Musashi.

...He wanted to know if Musashi really wants our help.

None of them had laid any groundwork, so when asked something, it was necessary to discuss what each nation stood to gain.

So if Musashi rejected everything related to itself, it would mean they did not share the same benefits as the other nations.

So Suleiman had tested Musashi to see if they did share those same benefits.

The best answer for Suleiman would have been for Musashi’s vice president to ask the others what Musashi should do.

That would change any possible demands from the other nations into mere suggestions and the other nations would have to hold each other in check for their own benefit.

But Musashi’s vice president had used Suleiman’s words against him. She had used the question to strike a deal with Hexagone Française.

Musashi was not revealing their intentions. She had only borrowed Suleiman’s words to question Hexagone Française. Suleiman could not say anything here. If he demanded she answer his question, she could simply promise to do so after hearing what the other nations had to say. And...

“Attacking us one at a time, are you?”

Suleiman realized what Matsunaga meant and finally nodded. He then spoke so only Matsunaga could hear.

“She isn’t used to meetings like this, so she would have a hard time dealing with us all at once. Instead, she must be building up her opinion by dealing with us each separately. But it is very interesting that she chose Hexagone Française first. After all...”

After all...

“Anne of Austria also likes to go on the attack.”

Masazumi viewed Anne as her greatest enemy. A lot was unknown about Suleiman and Hisahide, but she had no reason to call them a clear enemy.

With Anne, however, there was just such a reason.

“I am honored you chose me first, Musashi Vice President. So you want to know what support Hexagone Française will provide Musashi if you maintain your hostile stance toward P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics?”

Anne smiled in the *signe cadre* screen, but her smile was not directed at Masazumi. The girl was looking to Suleiman who sat cross-legged with a hand on his chin.

“Are you stupid? And I mean both the Musashi Vice President and Old Man Suleiman. I mean, it’s been predetermined that Ariadust will fight Hashiba and seize control of the Far East. Simply following the history recreation ensures that.”

Anne smiled again.

“Yes, and yet Musashi is trying to make a deal with us based on the possibility of ‘reconciling with P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics’. It’s too stupid to dignify with a real response. Listen. Ariadust is destined to oppose Hashiba eventually. That means both P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R.’s Hashiba. And besides, there’s no way Hexagone Française will support Musashi.”

After all...

“Hexagone Française is the only one here whose history guarantees we will

oppose Musashi.”

...I had a feeling she was going to bring that up!

The way Masazumi saw it, there was an “absolute” difference between Hexagone Française and the other nations and academies.

The simple category of enemy also included Matsunaga of P.A. Oda, but the history recreation would have Matsunaga rebel against Nobunaga and blow himself up along with the Hiragumo tea kettle.

That happened relatively early, so when looking specifically at Matsunaga’s relationship with Matsudaira...

...He has no history recreation against Matsudaira.

But Hexagone Française and the Mouri clan were different. According to history, they would be enemies at the decisive Battle of Sekigahara. Matsudaira’s Eastern Army would win while Mouri would be subjugated and would fall into decline.

For both sides, their initial relationship began as enemies.

And that enemy spoke.

“Musashi does not need to involve itself in our world. After eradicating Hashiba and stopping the Apocalypse but before Mouri’s decline, you can return to being what you once were. *We would* be willing to support you in that endeavor.”

Masazumi listened to what could be interpreted as an absolute rejection, but...

...?

Something seemed off to her.

Masazumi asked herself why this girl was refusing any kind of negotiation.

...If she refuses to negotiate, why would she be here in a place of negotiation?

The answer was simple.

...I was wrong, wasn't I?

Anne had simply reacted to Masazumi's proposal. She had rejected it because she could not accept those terms. To put it another way, she would not have refused if Masazumi had given her terms she could accept.

Masazumi had made a mistake.

Due to the lack of groundwork, she had failed to understand Anne's situation and had thus made a mistake.

In that case, she thought. What did I get wrong?

She summed up what she had asked.

...I asked if Hexagone Française would be able to support Musashi if we opposed P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics.

"Oh."

As she repeated the proposal, she realized her mistake.

Dragon Dog: "Something just changed inside her."

ANA: "Leave it to a former combat automaton to notice."

Dragon Dog: "Testament. Musashi's vice president was hesitant earlier, so her body's axis was a bit unstable. I could only describe it as somewhat downturned. But now the tension has grown and she is facing us. ...This could be dangerous."

ANA: "Dangerous? What do you mean?"

Dragon Dog: "Testament. I have determined Musashi's vice president has lowered her hips while raising her body for an attack."

Dragon Dog: "Here it comes. She just started nodding."

Masazumi got up from the grass, stared straight at her opponent, and opened her mouth.

"Anne of Austria, I seem to have caused a bit of a misunderstanding. Please allow me to make my suggestion again."

This is such an amateur's way of correcting herself, she thought. But there's no helping that. I am an amateur.

She decided to be more careful in the future.

She now understood that she had stated her previous suggestion incorrectly.

How should she have stated it when speaking to Anne of Austria?

...It doesn't hinge on our hostile stance toward P.A. Oda and the M.H.R.R. Catholics.

The correct condition was as follows:

"If Musashi maintains a friendly relationship with Louis Exiv and Mouri Terumoto..."

...And I don't ask if their academy will support Musashi.

She should have said this instead:

"What suggestion will you give to Louis Exiv and Mouri Terumoto?"

The darkness of night began to fill the sky beyond a great floating shape.

The Hiragumo floated above Magdeburg where five individuals had gathered by the fire-lit front of a cathedral. Kimi sat on the stone steps with a sign frame open while Futayo, Naruze, Adele, and Yoshiyasu gathered around her.

Yoshiyasu tilted her head when she saw the writing on Kimi's sign frame.

"Why is she basing this on individuals like Anne, Louis Exiv, and Mouri Terumoto instead of on Hexagone Française as a whole?"

She felt it was a sad question for a student council president to have to ask.

...But it should help me study diplomacy.

She had been with Musashi for less than a day, but she could not take that time lightly because, every so often, opportunities like this were mixed in with all the inhumane incidents and behavior. However, it was the eccentric sister of Musashi's chancellor who answered.

"Heh heh. This Anne girl has built up her resolve. And make sure you

understand. The second character in the Far Eastern word for ‘resolve’ attacks the heart radical with five mouths at once!^[3] Five!? That’s going well beyond a threesome!”

Yoshiyasu had no idea what the girl was talking about. The Weiss Hexen waved a hand, telling her not to worry about it, but that same girl had also drawn Yoshiyasu in her Magie Figur and said something about “Should I put her with Asama? No, I do that too often. I need to think of something else.” In other words, the Technohexen was no different from the eccentric sister.

At any rate, she needed to understand what was going on in this meeting, so she tried to remember all her knowledge about that sort of thing.

...Yoshiyori is always telling me-...

She stopped thinking there because she wanted to avoid having him lecture her even in her own mind.

However, she did remember feeling Anne’s resolve as the girl had pulled on her hand.

...What was that?

At that point, the vassal tilted her head.

“Um, Kimi-san? What would Hexagone Française’s previous provisional chancellor’s resolve be in this case?”

“Well.” The dancer turned toward Yoshiyasu with a bitter smile. “Listen. Anne’s resolve concerns her imminent absence.”

“ ... ”

Yoshiyasu was unable to immediately react.

...Her imminent absence?

Her thoughts refused to continue any further partially because she was having trouble connecting an individual life to a negotiation between academies that supported entire nations. However, there was a bigger reason.

...My sister.

Had her sister had a similar resolve about her own death?

If she had been the same as Anne was now...

“Sorry.”

Everyone turned around when that word escaped her mouth.

She panicked at their questioning looks and felt embarrassed of what she had said.

But she shook her head and corrected her thoughts. She then asked a question while keeping in mind that this person was a lot like her sister.

“Anne is negotiating with her death approaching, so why is she opposing Musashi? And why is Musashi’s vice president resuming negotiations with her, Louis Exiv, and Mouri Terumoto instead of with Hexagone Française?”

“Well,” said the dancer. “Simply put, this girl had already retired. How is someone like that supposed to influence her nation or her academy?”

The vassal immediately replied.

“Usually as a regent or through a cloistered rule.”

“Judge,” replied the dancer before looking back up at Yoshiyasu. “It can’t go that far in Anne’s case, though. She went as far as to place herself in Magdeburg after retiring, so she was essentially saying she no longer has any value. But...”

But...

“She was able to do all that because she left everything to her brother, Louis Exiv. She believes her brother can do something even if Hashiba invades Mouri. She believes he will protect his wife’s clan. That is why she grows hostile when someone treats her like Hexagone Française’s ruler. It means you don’t trust the brother she has placed such faith in.”

What does that mean? wondered Yoshiyasu.

She went on to frown and ask about the source of her confusion.

“I don’t understand. Why does she trust her brother so much? Is it because of the Testament descriptions?”

“Oh? You don’t know?”

The dancer stabbed sharply to the side with her question. Her tone was strong enough for Yoshiyasu to draw back a bit and the Weiss Hexen glared at her.

“I more or less know the answer, but you really support Anne, don’t you?”

“Heh heh. Yes, but the cuteness of a foolish brother is greatly influenced by whether he is an older or younger brother.”

The dancer smiled just a bit.

“You see, Anne does not simply trust her brother. She is bragging about her own abilities. If she couldn’t trust in the brother she supported for so long, she would be doubting what she herself had done. She is bragging that she has no worries and nothing but confidence in everything that will occur after her death. And it is all because of the nation she created and the brother she raised and supported so he could respond to any possible situation. ...That is the kind of woman Anne of Austria is.”

A self-deprecating bitterness entered her smile.

“Unlike me, the situation must have required her to support him quite a lot. So at the very least, she will have no regrets once she is lost. She can brag about how well-made a brother she has. Otherwise she would not be able to trust this brother who chose another woman to be his wife.”

“Then...what is your vice president supposed to do?”

“You don’t know?” asked the dancer while speaking clearly. “Unlike me, she is like a fruit tree that protects its flowers and then withers away. Now, Masazumi, tell her you are here to water the flower she has supported and not her, the withered tree. That is what she wants from you. So...”

Kimi pulled Uzy from her cleavage and had the Mouse display a divine transmission spell keyboard.

“Masazumi, listen. A proper woman cannot mistake who she is dealing with.”

Masazumi glanced at the text Kimi sent her.

Wise Sister: “Are you listening!? Are you!? You’re dealing with a little sister character, so make sure you understand how madly in love with her big bro she

is! Make sure of it!! And if you still don't understand, grope Asama's chest until you do!!"

She truly did not understand, but she was unsure what to do. Would groping a chest really help?

"Eh? Wh-why are you staring at me, Masazumi?"

"Oh, um... No reason...probably."

The crazy person's advice was about what she would expect, but she already understood one thing: Anne of Austria was her greatest enemy at this meeting.

...I should be able to share in what she has protected.

"I won't ask for much, Anne of Austria. I just have one request for you," said Masazumi. "Currently, Musashi and Hexagone Française have entered a ceasefire. I want to make that an official end of hostilities. Otherwise, we can never begin a friendly relationship with Louis XIV and Mouri Terumoto."

"That's true."

Anne did not say much, but...

...She finally agreed with something I said.

"However..."

That word of caution came with a smile and her tone said she would not let this go as Masazumi wanted.

Masazumi understood why: she was an amateur. And as a beginner, she had chosen to negotiate with each nation individually.

...But even if I settle things with one nation, another can speak out about how that affects them.

What nation would not want an amicable relationship between Hexagone Française and Musashi?

"I can't have you forgetting about M.H.R.R., Musashi Vice President and Anne of Austria."

Tomoe crossed her arms and faced Masazumi.

...Here it comes.

After Suleiman and Anne, the third round is beginning, she thought.

And Tomoe's words seemed to substantiate her thoughts.

"How about you speak a little with us...with M.H.R.R.?"

Chapter 63: Collective Resister

CHAPTER 63

"Collective Resister"



What is it I hear?
Divided resentment?
Or joyous relief?

Point Allocation (National Circumstances)

What is it I hear?

Divided resentment?

Or joyous relief?

Point Allocation (National Circumstances)

Tomoe nodded once and spoke to Musashi's vice president and Mazarin of Hexagone Française.

"Listen. If Musashi and Hexagone Française are allowed a unilateral friendship, there is no saving M.H.R.R. Just to be clear, the M.H.R.R. Protestants must oppose the Catholics thanks to the Sack of Magdeburg, but we are part of the same overall collective as the Catholics. Do not forget that we did not oppose them until the Sack because we benefit when they benefit."

So...

"If Musashi opposes the M.H.R.R. Catholics as a sign of friendship with Hexagone Française, the Thirty Years' War will bring more damage to M.H.R.R. than it otherwise would. The same holds true if Musashi sticks to behind-the-scenes support. So..."

She breathed in.

"The M.H.R.R. Protestants would find it most regrettable if Musashi chose to oppose the Catholics to negotiate a friendship with Hexagone Française."

Masazumi saw a message from Naruze on her sign frame.

Mal-Ga: "Why not ignore this pain-in-the-ass old hag and keep going?"

She noticed Asama quickly erasing the log and then heard the girl sigh.

Asama: "There. But is ignoring her, as Naruze suggested, not an option? M.H.R.R. is Hashiba and they will lose the war. It seems horrible to just ignore them no matter what they say, but as a politician, shouldn't you keep that option in reserve?"

Could I really do that? wondered Masazumi.

But...

Vice President: “No, I can’t. After all, M.H.R.R. will be at Westphalia.”

Almost Everyone: “Oh, that’s right.”

Novice: “Eh!? I wasn’t part of that ‘almost’! I already knew that!”

Four Eyes: “Why do you insist on showing off like that?”

Novice: What’s wrong with it!? And how did you get into our chat again!?”

Asama: “Eh? Oh, because this is a Protestant city. ...I did it to show off the spirit of the Asama Shrine.”

Novice: “Y-you didn’t have to do that! You didn’t!!”

Then couldn’t you ask Asama to cut the connection? wondered Masazumi, but since he did not, he may not have truly wanted to be separated from Shakespeare.

...So the M.H.R.R. Protestants and Catholics are pretty much the same?

They were on opposite sides of a war, but M.H.R.R. was a collective nation of principalities that belonged to both groups.

Despite the internal conflict, they were still a solid group when it came to opposing external foes. They were only going to oppose each other after Magdeburg because the Catholics had crossed a line. So...

...Even as Protestants, they cooperate with the Catholics to form M.H.R.R. as a whole.

When viewed as a single nation, any damage to the Catholics would also be a burden on the Protestants.

So if Musashi’s actions during the Thirty Years’ War caused more damage than M.H.R.R. would have taken in a normal history recreation, the Protestants would not support Musashi.

Novice: “Therefore, they don’t want us to oppose the Catholics.”

Righteousness: “...What if you still do it?”

Wise Sister: “Oh? Yoshy is included in the chat? Heh heh heh. We’re all typing,

but it's wonderful how everyone goes the extra mile to add in the ellipses and such! Do you want me to hit you!?"

Four Eyes: "Who is Yoshi?"

Mal-Ga: "A flat-chested long-lived girl from another academy's student council who's staying on the Musashi for the time being!!"

Novice: "Ahhhh!! Do you have any idea how dangerous that statement was!?"

Four Eyes: "It doesn't really matter. ...Yeah, I think I'll go investigate that person, so talk to you later."

Novice: "Don't just assume we'll be talking later! And don't cause any international incidents!"

Almost Everyone: "G-get a room?"

Masazumi had a feeling something horrific was in the works, but she hoped she was only imagining it.

At any rate...

Righteousness: "How about we get back on topic? What happens if you still oppose the Catholics?"

That was a simple matter, so Masazumi used Tsukinowa to form a reply.

Vice President: "We would lose the support of the M.H.R.R. Protestants during the Peace of Westphalia. In the worst case, Holland and all the other Protestant nations would turn against us."

If possible, Masazumi wanted to make sure Musashi sided with the victors of the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia. And she wanted to do so by earning their gratitude.

If Musashi had Hexagone Française, Holland, and other victors on their side, it would be easier to accomplish their goals with the Logismoí Óplo and freeing themselves from provisional rule.

...I'd love to do that, but opposing the M.H.R.R. Catholics would mean making an enemy of the M.H.R.R. Protestants and the Protestant nations they

cooperate with.

Novice: “It would be pretty bad to lose the great victor of Holland. They’re Protestant and they cooperate with the M.H.R.R. Protestants, so they could still oppose Musashi even though they come out on top with M.H.R.R.’s defeat. They could claim we caused more damage to their allies than the history recreation required.”

Vice President: “And that would make it all the easier for the other victors to similarly hide behind the history recreation.”

Mal-Ga: “Then we just have to avoid opposing the M.H.R.R. Catholics, right?”

Novice: “We can’t do that either. You remember the group that attacked us this morning, right? The M.H.R.R. Catholics and P.A. Oda are our enemies.”

Tonbokiri: “This is getting complicated, so how about a snack break?”

Almost Everyone: “You sure are honest with yourself!!”

Futayo has always been like that, recalled Masazumi while continuing to think.

Hexagone Française had just revealed the threat of Hashiba and the M.H.R.R. Catholics joining forces, so they could earn Hexagone Française’s gratitude by opposing that combined force.

But the M.H.R.R. Protestants said they wanted to avoid having Musashi join the fight against the Catholics they shared a collective nation with.

...If only we could split Hashiba from the M.H.R.R. Catholics.

But how could they do that?

...Physically? Politically? According to their roles? No...

She thought through a number of ideas as she tried to figure out what to do.

“Well...”

She began to wonder what kind of simple conclusion that idiot would reach in this situation.

...There is a way.

There was. It was a simple yet highly dangerous way of resolving this.

“I have a suggestion for the M.H.R.R. secretary who represents the M.H.R.R. Protestants.”

Suleiman listened to Musashi’s vice president speak.

She leaned forward while sitting cross-legged in the grass and gently spread her arms. She then formed a smile that could be seen as bitter or self-deprecating.

“It is still a vague suggestion, but there is a single method of completely splitting P.A. Oda’s Hashiba from the M.H.R.R. Catholics. Needless to say, this is something that will be proven by Musashi’s future actions.”

“Tell me.” Tomoe nodded expressionlessly. “I will make up my mind after that.”

“As will I,” said Suleiman to urge the girl onward while thinking he knew what she was going to say.

...If I am right, the Far East will need to be cautious at the very least.

But he also thought they had already made up their minds about this.

...The question is whether they are aware of this decision of theirs.

He looked to her and asked his heart how he would react if he received the response he was hoping for.

As he watched, Musashi’s vice president breathed in just once and then spoke calmly.

“Listen.”

Here it came.

“Before the Peace of Westphalia, Musashi will destroy Hashiba as a Far Eastern power.”

Masazumi made her suggestion.

“Musashi will destroy Hashiba not as a Catholic or Protestant power, but as a

Far Eastern one.”

If they did that...

“Hashiba can be split from the M.H.R.R. Catholics. Due to our history of opposing Hashiba, only Musashi can accomplish this. And if Hashiba is defeated before the Peace of Westphalia, the victors can pay no heed to P.A. Oda as they make their demands and speak of the defeated nations as nothing more than that.”

This was the answer to what she had been asked at the beginning of the meeting. This was their stance against P.A. Oda.

“Musashi is P.A. Oda’s enemy.”

And...

“Musashi will handle Hashiba.”

Asama heard laughter. Suleiman was leaning forward and laughing in his monk’s robe of a Far Eastern uniform. He laughed uncontrollably, but held his right palm toward Asama and Masazumi.

“Sorry, sorry. My apologies. B-but...I am not laughing at your idea.”

Then what are you laughing at? wondered Asama while exchanging a glance with Masazumi.

Suleiman tried to catch his breath before continuing.

“Oh, what is it? To think I had such humor left in me! That must be it!”

Asama: “ ‘In me’? So it wasn’t that Masazumi was funny?”

Vice President: “Wait, wait, wait. Don’t say anything that will cause misunderstandings.”

Wise Sister: “That’s right, Asama. We can’t have anyone mistakenly thinking Masazumi is funny!”

Vice President: “Huh? Am I being attacked right now?”

Mal-Ga: “Then make a joke about Holland.”

Vice President: “Eh? ...Well, I hear tulips cover the ‘whole-land’ of ‘Holland’.”

Mal-Ga: “Wait, why are you laughing, Yoshi!? I’ll put you in my doujinshi!”

Righteousness: “Eh? Y-you people are strict!”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. This is the problem with flat-chested fighters who don’t know how to enjoy themselves! You need to get some training at the physical comedy-style solitary confinement hall at the shrine of an entertainer god!”

At any rate, Masazumi waited for Suleiman to calm down before opening her mouth. She did not know why he had laughed, but it was not because he had a poor opinion of her.

“I do not know how we will do so. It’s just a proposal.”

After all...

“Hashiba meets a slow death rather than a decisive one in battle, so it would be impossible to use the history recreation to destroy them in battle.”

Novice: “That’s right. Hashiba died of old age. That’s one of the main reasons he was known for unifying the Far East and bringing the Warring States period to an end. He lived out his life in the peace he created instead of dying in battle. Matsudaira then plotted to take advantage of the following chaos within the Hashiba forces and took the Far East for himself.”

Yoshiyasu tilted her head when she saw those words in the dancer’s sign frame.

“So you want to defeat Hashiba, but no one can force that death onto her? What are you going to do?”

“There is still a way.” The dancer smiled bitterly. “In this age, you can hide behind the history recreation and force death onto someone as long as you have the power to back it up.”

“You’re going to put someone to death by force?”

“Don’t be silly.”

The dancer’s bitter smile grew, but she pointed to the sign frame where the words of Musashi’s vice president appeared.

Vice President: “There is no certain way of destroying Hashiba, but the method itself is clear.”

That being...

Vice President: “We use the rules of the history recreation to end Hashiba’s history recreation.”

...Can you do that!?

Yoshiyasu gasped at what Musashi’s vice president had said and recalled something.

Not long ago, much the same thing had happened in Mikawa and England.

However, those had been a true forced death based in the history recreation.

...Everyone was listening with bated breath to the divine radio in the Satomi living room.

Then, when Musashi’s chancellor and student council president had ended the confrontation on the bridge and walked down the stairs, “that man”, Yoshiyori, had left the living room on his own. Yoshiyasu had wondered why he was not listening through to the end, but she had later found a new flower on her sister’s grave.

Musashi’s chancellor and president’s determination at Mikawa had led that man to make some kind of decision and dedicate some kind of feelings at that grave.

Yoshiyasu did not know what he had meant by it.

...So...

So even as her heart filled with irritation toward herself, she was curious about Musashi because that man had shown an interest in it.

...How will they handle the kind of situation that set his heart in motion!?

If they were not going to force death on someone, what were they going to do?

“How does Musashi plan to ‘defeat’ Hashiba!?”

Masazumi did not know the specific method, but she had a general policy in mind.

“Listen. Musashi will not carry out the kind of deadly history recreation forced on us at Mikawa or nearly consented to in England. This was decided by Musashi’s Princess and Vicereine Horizon Ariadust and is the general consensus of Musashi as a whole.”

So...

“Instead of an assassination, we will push the Far Eastern history recreation forward and leave Hashiba with nothing more to recreate. In other words...”

She had said something similar to England’s Fairy Queen.

“We will set history in motion and use that result as a weapon.”

Tomoe smiled bitterly in her heart when she heard Musashi’s vice president.

...The Far East has quite the strict new representative.

She would bring Hashiba to its end in order to strip it away from M.H.R.R.

Everyone here had to have a number of ideas how to accomplish that, but the situation would change greatly if Hashiba was truly eliminated from M.H.R.R. The Catholics would be greatly weakened, the Protestant minority would have much more influence over them, and if it was all done before Westphalia...

...M.H.R.R. can actually stand its ground during Westphalia.

If Hashiba remained when the Thirty Years’ War ended, the nations attending the Peace of Westphalia would try to strip M.H.R.R. of as much power as they could. But if Hashiba was gone, the Peace of Westphalia could remain a peace conference based entirely on the history recreation. They would have to do something about Student Council President Matthias who had invited in

Hashiba, but it would be possible to play the role of victims.

“In that case, our influence at the Peace would be directly connected to how well the Catholics and Protestants could work together to regain our strength beforehand.”

If Matthias could be used as a scapegoat and the Catholics and Protestants could reconcile, the two sides would be able to come together quite quickly.

...Honestly.

Thinking about that brought the past to Tomoe's mind.

Tomoe had a long past.

Long ago, she had been used as a scapegoat.

During the Genpei War, she, her husband Minamoto Yoshinaka, Yoshitsune, and Yoshitsune's brother Yoritomo had worked together to defeat the Taira family. However, their army had been fairly crude and some turbulent times had arrived once they had entered Kyou. That had partially been due to the history recreation, but...

...Well, we had a lot of fun.

At the same time, the friction between Yoritomo and Yoshitsune had gradually risen to the surface and, as the Minamoto clan had gathered strength to defeat the Taira family, the nobles had realized they were becoming a new threat in the Taira family's place.

So as a scapegoat for a number of problems, Yoshinaka's forces in Kyou had been attacked and defeated by Yoshitsune.

Tomoe would be lying if she said she did not hold a grudge. Even if it was part of the history recreation, she could not accept some of it. Most importantly of all, her beloved husband, Yoshinaka, had been killed.

So she had decided to live on. First, she had followed her grudge against Yoshitsune, crossed over to the continent, and fought against Yoshitsune's Yuan Dynasty. As that horse-riding empire had conquered westward into Eastern Europe, Tomoe had struggled against them in the name of fighting Yoshitsune

while taking on a few different inherited names from Eastern Europe and Russia.

Finally, the Yuan Dynasty had fallen and split into various horse-riding nations which changed form and died out.

Was that enough to say she had defeated Yoshitsune? Or had history simply continued on? She did not know, but she did know what she had felt back then.

She had lost her reason to fight.

But by that time, she had become well-known in Europe and a lot of people had gathered to rely on her when the harmonic world was destroyed during the Harmonic Unification War.

She had ultimately chosen this city of Magdeburg.

Magdeburg was where Otto I, the original emperor of M.H.R.R., slept.

She had heard he had used this land as the front line base against the horse-riders and savages arriving from the east. The fact that she had seen herself in him showed that she had still viewed herself as a hero of the Genpei War, but...

...I decided to take their side.

The Testament had still been updating after the Harmonic Unification War and it had informed them of the Reformation to come from M.H.R.R and it had told them the Protestants would win their position in the world despite being oppressed.

I see.

Long ago, we caused trouble and were purged.

And now, those trying to purify their world will be purged yet will remain.

And that is why I am here now.

I do see Yoshitsune from time to time. That idiot always complains that I'm there and tries to pick a fight with me, but she's probably just trying to get me to hate her.

Now, then, thought Tomoe. I need to focus on the present instead of the past.

The situation might be different, but I can't make a scapegoat of Matthias. However, that will make it difficult to bring together the Catholics and

Protestants without any spilt blood.

“I assume I would be able to play an important role in that,” she said. “It is an interesting idea and it is worth thinking about.”

Masazumi listened to Tomoe.

“Ending Hashiba’s history recreation before Westphalia means advancing history that far in about four months. That will be difficult, but it is Musashi’s problem. We only need to see whether you pull it off and criticize you if you do not.”

“You don’t hold back, do you, old lady?”

Tomoe bared her fangs toward Matsunaga and Guericke slid back two spots.

...Oh, c’mon. Please don’t start fighting here.

Despite Masazumi’s thought, Tsukinowa opened a sign frame.

Wise Sister: “Yeah, that was worth getting mad at.”

Mal-Ga: “Yes. It was definitely worth getting mad at.”

Huh? Is there something wrong with me as a girl if I didn’t think that? wondered Masazumi with a mental tilt of her head, but Tomoe corrected her posture after only clicking her tongue toward Matsunaga.

She then faced the two from Hexagone Française.

“And I don’t think Musashi’s suggestion contradicts what you want.”

“Testament. That’s true. If Hashiba is defeated early, it will shorten the amount of time Mouri is under their control. It would be nice to have that end while we can still find a way to avoid doing everything they say. And if Musashi has a friendly relationship with my brother and Terumoto, it opens up a lot of options for the later Battle of Sekigahara. ...Mazarin, what do you think as treasurer?”

“Testament.” Mazarin nodded. “According to my calculations, a shorter time under Hashiba’s rule will reduce what they can take from us as a sign of our fealty. And Sekigahara will be a lot cheaper if we can use connections with

Matsudaira to talk things out.”

...She sure is blunt.

“Then,” said Anne. “I’d say it’s an option. But listen, Musashi Vice President. There are three problems with your suggestion.

“First, Hashiba’s history recreation is closely connected to the history of a lot of other Far Eastern commanders, so you won’t be able to advance history just for Hashiba. You might get everyone related to Hashiba or even the entire Far East involved and end up with a massive war on your hands. Are you aware of that?

“Second, you say you want to advance the history recreation, but where will you begin? You can’t do anything without a starting point.

“And third,” she said. “Does Musashi have the power as a nation to do this?”

“Listen,” said Anne, but not to Musashi’s vice president. “Old Man Matsunaga.”

“What’s this all of a sudden, little lady?”

“You’re going to tell Hashiba...no, Nobunaga everything that happens at this meeting, aren’t you? After all, P.A. Oda gave Musashi a warning this morning. It was a simple demonstration of what would happen if they stuck their nose in P.A. Oda’s business. And that was on Hashiba’s instructions, wasn’t it?”

“Wait a second.”

Musashi’s vice president raised her right hand and frowned when Anne gave her a look that said, “What is it?”

“Are you saying Hashiba sent Sassa Narimasa, Shibata Katsuie, and Takigawa Ichimasu to determine our strength because she predicted what this meeting would be about and that Musashi would oppose them?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. It must have been a good opportunity for Hashiba and for P.A. Oda to learn what kind of a threat Musashi posed to them. So...”

A sudden chill reached Anne and she grimaced a little.

...Don't worry.

I still have plenty of time. I have to believe that. At the very least, I'm not going to disappear here, so focus on that. And I need to say this, even if it sounds harsh.

...I have the special privilege of saying whatever I want without worrying about the personal consequences.

"If you advance Hashiba's history recreation, it will involve the history recreations of those with a close connection to her. But based on this morning, it doesn't look like you would be able to force Katsuie or Sassa's history recreations onto them. And..."

She said it.

"If you are going to 'end' Hashiba, you will first need to 'end' Oda Nobunaga, her boss. ...Can you do that?"

Masazumi listened to Anne.

"That won't be easy. Nobunaga still remains hidden yet has earned great trust from P.A. Oda's leaders. And while Nobunaga's Genesis Project is still a mystery, we do know they are constructing some massive structure inside the stealth barrier surrounding Lake Biwa."

"Is there anything else?"

"The Princess Disappearances. Just as Maeda Toshiie stated and demonstrated in England, they must know something about that mystery you are pursuing."

A response came as soon as Asama sent Anne's words to the others using Hanami's voice input.

Novice: "Vice President Honda-kun, ask about Richelieu again. He was a victim of the Princess Disappearances and he was Hexagone Française's treasurer during Anne of Austria's era and before, so I bet Anne knows something about him."

“Judge,” sent back Masazumi as she faced Anne. This would be a digression, but Lord Motonobu had said at Mikawa that investigating the Princess Disappearances would lead to stopping the Apocalypse.

“Could you provide us with some details on Cardinal Richelieu’s Princess Disappearance? It doesn’t have to be now and it can just be a general summary if you want.”

“He just suddenly disappeared is all. Right, Mazarin?”

“Testament. He was going through the process of handing the treasurer position over to me and he told me to wait for a moment while he signed the paperwork. And then...”

Novice: “That’s just like Sakakibara-sama!”

Masazumi immediately realized what Neshinbara meant. That situation was very similar to when Principal Sakai witnessed Sakakibara Yasumasa’s disappearance at Mikawa. He had prepared some water and...

“Did Cardinal Richelieu leave behind any kind of message?”

Mazarin’s eyebrows rose and she peered into the *signe cadre* she held. Anne then nodded and gave a slight smile.

“It would seem the Princess Disappearances truly are afflicting the Far East as well. To be honest, I was skeptical of these stories, but fine. ‘Because there is a short delay before the Princess Disappearance is complete’, the victim has time to leave behind a message. If you know that, then you must have experienced the real thing.”

She continued speaking.

“This is something I heard from someone long ago. ...Before inheriting his name, Richelieu apparently went missing for about three years.”

...Eh?

“You’ve heard something similar before, haven’t you?”

Masazumi had indeed heard of a Princess Disappearances victim having gone missing in the past.

...Crossunite gave us bits and pieces and Mary later gave us an official report.

“Judge. I have. Before inheriting their names, Henry VIII, Queen Catherine, and Anne Boleyn went missing for a year.”

“It apparently happened during Richelieu’s high school years.”

Wait, thought Masazumi. Her mind could not keep up with so much sudden information.

However, Anne continued without letting her catch up.

“His final message was, ‘The Princess has a parent’.”

To Asama, something did not feel right about those words.

...Huh?

What is it? she wondered and opened a sign frame to check the divine network.

But suddenly, Anne’s eyes turned her way.

She was looking at Asama’s hands on the spell keyboard.

“ ... ”

But Anne only smiled. Asama nodded back without thinking and realized the two of them had reached an understanding.

...Eh?

Anne’s smile seemed to be praising her for reaching the right answer.

...Eh!? W-wait! But I don’t understand anything yet!

This is bad, she realized. *Anne is definitely asking me to answer the mystery hidden in those words.*

...U-um... What could it be? Well, anyway, I need to make my search.

But she was away from the Musashi and this was a Western Protestant city. She could not use Musashi’s databank and she would have to convert her query into German to make a search. She started up a translation spell and typed in “The Princess has a parent”, but...

“...!?”

She realized what Anne’s hidden trick was.

“Was that message in Far Eastern!?”

“Yes. It was written just as I said it. After all, Richelieu was originally from the Far East.”

And...

“To kill some time while lying in my hospital bed, I once asked him about when he had gone missing and he smiled. He was already past middle-age and well on his way to being an old man at the time. We had no choice what with the history recreation, but we were always saying nasty things to each other and lying to each other. But this time, he was probably trying to pass it off as a joke, but it contained a hint of something different.”

Anne spoke to Musashi’s vice president.

“He nostalgically told me he had gone to a nonexistent academy.”

“A nonexistent academy?” asked Masazumi.

But she accepted Anne’s words and began thinking on them.

...If I sum it up, this is what she’s telling me:

- **The Princess has a parent.**

- **When Richelieu and the others went missing, they were at a “nonexistent” academy.**

She had no way of analyzing those two facts here, so...

“You have given us some valuable information and some important hints to guide Musashi in the future. I thank you.”

“Testament. But what will you do? Is Musashi truly going to advance Hashiba’s history recreation from the outside? That decision necessitates conflict with Nobunaga, you know?”

“I need them to do that,” added Suleiman. “My goal is to reclaim my birthplace. I want to take back Mt. Hiei and the Mlasi holy land. That is why I have been working with Matsunaga here.”

“Yeah, because I happen to be the one who’s currently in charge of the Kii Peninsula.” A small smile entered Matsunaga’s voice. “But let me say one thing for now. Let me tell you why someone like me is here under the temporary command of M.H.R.R.”

That being...

“It’s standard practice before a battle, but we need to discuss whether all of you will accept our terms for the Sack of Magdeburg. If you will, you can surrender in advance.”

Chapter 64: Searcher of a Dark Path

CHAPTER 64

"Searcher of a Dark Path"



Can you bring the situation with you
When you make a decision?

Point Allocation (Self-Judgment)

Can you bring the situation with you

When you make a decision?

Point Allocation (Self-Judgment)

Several people wearing black stood in a thicket of dark trees.

A tall woman stood in the lead and several boys and girls followed.

They were the Reine des Garous and the Musashi group sent to meet Rudolf II.

At the back of the line, Mitotsudaira turned around and narrowed her eyes to peer into the forest that was already filling with darkness.

“The unicorns have gone now that we’ve left their territory, haven’t they?”

Mitotsudaira turned her back on the others to look into the darkness and sighed in her heart.

...We covered a lot of ground pretty quickly, but we still have a long way to go.

Unfortunately, the divine protection had run out on the ivy wrapped around the chancellor. It had happened while they were still riding the unicorns, so she had been forced to drag him along with the ivy. He had yelled with excitement, but she had felt more like an execution rider than a knight.

Mary had reapplied the protection, but the ivy itself had been worn down enough that it snapped partway through and they had planted it in the earth again.

However, they had been unable to find any other suitable ivy.

...Well, I suppose this is as far as the unicorns can take us.

“But mother, we may have crossed into M.H.R.R., but we still have forests and valleys to travel through. What are we going to do?”

She looked over her shoulder to see a calm smile on her mother’s lips.

“We will wait until our next ‘ride’ gets here. It’s been a while since I called it, so it may take a while. But...”

The Reine des Garous reached into her pocket, pulled out a piece of parchment and an attached *signe cadre*, and tilted her head.

“Anne and the others must be holding their secret meeting in Magdeburg right now. I can guess most of what they’ll talk about, but what is the M.H.R.R. ambassador from P.A. Oda going to say?”

“I would assume the customary recommendation of capitulation,” said the ninja.

The crossdresser reacted immediately.

“Recommendation of titillation!? Where!? I want to be a part of that!”

“Reine des Garous, you can ignore that. Now, about the recommendation of capitulation...”

“Yes.” The Reine des Garous placed a hand on her cheek. “Even if they claim to be doing it out of mercy, there are sure to be some strings attached. Assuming their purpose is to attack Magdeburg, it will likely be exactly what Anne mentioned in this letter,” she said. “First, they will request all of the documents on the Magdeburg Hemispheres. After all, those could easily be used to assist Musashi. And...”

“And? What else is there?”

“Testament.”

What she said next brought them all to a stop.

“They will similarly request Musashi’s princess and the Logismoι Óplo.”

“...”

They were all speechless, but she said nothing more on that subject.

“Now, we need to hurry on to Rudolf II. We won’t accomplish anything by discussing problems to come after that. ...So let’s go.”

She looked deep into the forest and Mitotsudaira did the same.

“Ah...”

Their next “ride” was here to replace the unicorns and Mitotsudaira heard hooves on the ground.

“At night, this will be faster than the unicorns. This monster represents the fear of night in Europe. ...A carriage drawn by a headless horse can carry us thousands of miles.”

The black carriage that arrived from the side produced sounds of wind and hooves yet produced no actual wind or clouds of dust.

The headless horse raised its front paw toward the Reine des Garous and spoke.

“Long time no see-mare.”

“M-mother! Why do I feel like we’re living in the Egg Monster series!?”

“How rude. Isn’t he cute? The blue flames along the neck cut will disappoint anyone obsessed with gore, though. Well, no need to wait around for my complaining daughter. Hurry onboard everyone.”

“Me first!”

As soon as she opened the door, the idiot jumped in. “Oh, my,” said the mother as she escorted him inside with a smile. Mitotsudaira was upset that her job had been taken from her, but the idiot patted the black sofa with both hands.

“Get in, Nate, get in! You can have the window seat!”

“Eh? Next to you?”

Just as she began thinking about the proper positioning for a knight and her king, her mother placed her hands on her hips.

“If you don’t want to, maybe I’ll sit there.”

“It would bring shame to the title of special duty officer to allow that kind of danger!”

Just as Mitotsudaira began to climb in, she heard Mary laughing. The girl hid her smile behind a hand, took a breath, and looked eastward.

“I hope those in the meeting at Magdeburg are having this much fun.”

In Magdeburg and below Avalon’s night sky, Masazumi listened to Matsunaga.

He was explaining what P.A. Oda was demanding to accept their surrender.

...Just as I thought, they want the hemispheres and the Logismoi Óplo, including Horizon.

“To P.A. Oda, those things could be a problem for the Genesis Project. You can see how we have little choice,” said Matsunaga. “But I’m guessing the surrender negotiations aren’t going anywhere.”

Guericke and Anne nodded in agreement and Masazumi...

“Removing the Logismoi Óplo from Horizon would mean breaking down her body. ...We obviously can’t agree to that request.”

“So you’re giving us conditions we could never accept but claiming you still showed us a ‘merciful compromise’, hm?” said Anne. “Well, I have to admit demanding a surrender with strings attached is pretty amazing. ...In a way, I guess P.A. Oda wants power too.”

Guericke nodded in agreement.

“If you have the Logismoi Óplo, you can focus on the Genesis Project but still have a backup plan in case that project fails. Is that it?”

“I don’t really know the details about all this, but...” Matsunaga smiled bitterly. “I kind of wanted to meet Musashi’s princess for a variety of reasons.”

“I bet you did,” replied Masazumi before a sudden voice reached her from the side.

It was Guericke’s. Still sitting, he slid a half spot forward.

“At any rate, as Magdeburg’s provisional mayor, let me respond to the recommendation of capitulation concerning the Sack of Magdeburg.”

He closed his eyes and sighed before continuing.

“I cannot agree to surrender. ...After all, Magdeburg’s surrender is not a part of the history recreation.”

The negotiation indeed went nowhere.

Guericke’s decision left everyone speechless.

But just before the silence grew to a sigh, Suleiman opened his mouth.

“In that case, I suppose we’re back to normal or at least the way things were before, right?”

You make it sound so trivial, thought Masazumi, but to him, it really was a trivial matter. And when she thought about it...

...Musashi may be helping, but we’re really only an observer here.

Even Matsunaga had only been temporarily put under Hashiba’s command because Hashiba’s forces were stretched thin with their strategy placing them on multiple fronts. Matsunaga himself had no connection to the history recreation here.

...That’s probably exactly why he was sent here as their ambassador.

The others here had to understand that, so Masazumi relaxed her shoulders.

“In terms of the Sengoku period, Lord Matsunaga, we could probably take you hostage to negotiate with Hashiba.”

“That’s a dangerous idea, but it’s just the kind of idea I like. ...Then again, I’m not a part of this fight and my history recreation has me rebelling against Nobunaga twice before blowing myself up. If I was captured, they’d probably just leave me here.”

“Hold on. Then how am I supposed to get home?” asked Suleiman with a bitter smile.

Matsunaga laughed.

“Sassa’s outside the city too, so you’d probably have some trouble.”

...So Sassa and Suleiman know each other.

There are a lot of connections out there, thought Masazumi before suddenly thinking about her connection with Matsunaga.

But if she was ready to let her mind wander like that...

“I suppose that mostly ends the part of the meeting meant to determine Musashi’s position in the fight against P.A. Oda.”

After Masazumi's question, Guericke, Tomoe, and Anne all nodded.

"Hmm. I suppose. Then I guess it's time for the discussions between individual nations."

That noncommittal response came from Matsunaga's bitter smile.

Eventually, he continued.

"You're planning to pass through my place after Magdeburg, right? Are you really going to do that? I'll send out the Shigisan, you know? Are you sure you want that?"

"We can't allow ourselves to destroy the Hiragumo, so it is a formidable foe," replied Masazumi with a bitter smile of her own.

Matsunaga's smile relaxed.

"But," he said. "If you're doing Hashiba's history recreation, then it won't be long until I retire. I'll be rebelling, after all. How's that going to go?"

He asked that final question to no one in particular.

However, it did bring an image to Masazumi's mind. While at IZUMO the night before last, she had seen Matsunaga drinking at the cafe counter and the nudist cooking in the kitchen.

...Will that ever be able to happen again?

With that in mind, she made a suggestion.

"Once your role is complete, why not come to Musashi, Lord Matsunaga?"

"Huh?"

Matsunaga had a thought as that question escaped his throat.

...Oh, c'mon. What kind of pathetic sounds am I making now?

But it had been so sudden.

...They'll take me in?

That's ridiculous, he thought. That's impossible, he thought.

After all...

“Wait, wait, wait. I’m a pretty evil person. You’d be in trouble if the other nations knew I was with you. Some would ask you to hand me over and others would refuse to trust you. I’m a shogun killer and the burner of Toudai-ji. That’s just the kind of destroyer I am.”

That was also why he had agreed to work for Nobunaga.

Nobunaga had used the shogun as a puppet and burned Mt. Hiei.

...As destroyers, I’m the senior and Nobunaga is the junior.

“If necessary, I’ll kill and destroy. That’s the kind of person I am. But you’re different. Just like that idiot and your princess chose at Mikawa, you refuse to think of killing or destroying as necessary. We’re incompatible. And...”

He smiled a little as he spoke.

“In the Far East, I thought you couldn’t be a student past the age of eighteen.”

“Wouldn’t it be interesting if you became the one to destroy that rule?”

When he heard Musashi’s vice president, Suleiman elbowed Matsunaga’s shoulder.

“You’re a popular guy, Matsunaga.”

“It comes naturally to me.”

Musashi’s vice president smiled bitterly at the two men’s exchange.

“Well, just think of it as a suggestion.” The bitterness left her smile. “Our idiot and princess’s policy is to never lose anything. Lord Matsunaga, from what I’ve seen, you’re quite the trickster. In other words, you refuse to let anything go as planned. That’s why I won’t insist that you come. But if you’re ever nearby while on a trip, feel free to stop by.”

“I might even refuse to follow that plan of yours, you know?”

“That’s why it’s only a suggestion. If you visit us...” The bitterness returned to her smile. “You can speak and drink with the idiot who decided on this policy, you can meet the princess you wanted to see, and you can visit Principal Sakai and some others you might know. ...Whether it’s porn games or anything else,

you're free to do whatever you want."

The aide sitting next to the vice president tapped on her shoulder and glared at her. The aide handed over a sign frame and the vice president finally reformed her smile.

"Whatever you want that's *legal*."

"That sounds awfully restrictive..."

However, he let out a single smiling cough as if his chest were vibrating.

"Heh. I see. So that stupid boy and the princess have a policy of never losing anything, do they? Interesting. But...an evil person can't have people worrying about where he'll end up."

"Ha ha. Lord Matsunaga, I think that attitude is just about perfect."

"Don't flatter me," he said. "But what are you going to do? ...Musashi has no strength as a nation, isn't that right?"

That's right, thought Masazumi as she was drawn in by Matsunaga's tone of voice.

But...

"I mostly realized that at the meeting the night before last."

Her tone had gotten lighter which she felt showed her inexperience, but there was no point in hiding it here.

"Before, I had planned on travelling from England to M.H.R.R. to attend the Peace of Westphalia, but..."

But...

"Even if we managed to prove Musashi's ability to influence the history recreation at England, England was the only nation that really understood us. We also needed more than three weeks of repairs afterwards, so I think we are far too weak to handle the main forces of Hexagone Française or P.A. Oda. Musashi is currently carrying out the history recreation and fighting as the main force of a nation, but that is all. We aren't a true nation that can rush out into

the world at large and continue cruising indefinitely.”

Tonbokiri: “Sorry, Masazumi.”

Vice President: “It isn’t your responsibility. These recent battles haven’t even been individual duels. We’ve been using our overall power. And if that isn’t enough, we can never win a war even if we win some local battles.”

Masazumi knew that quite well, so...

Mal-Ga: “Wh-what is this serious mood between you two!? You’re trying to tempt me into drawing up a storyboard, aren’t you!? No, at this point, I should probably ink it too!”

Shut up, you idiot. But anyway, sighed Masazumi in her heart before opening her mouth.

She needed to express Musashi’s future plans.

“After helping rescue the people of Magdeburg from the Sack, Musashi plans to enter Kantou with the help of Qing-Takeda. Of course, that’s after traveling from Osaka Bay and forcing our way through Lord Matsunaga’s land.”

She looked across the others’ faces.

They were all looking her way, but they looked more curious than serious.

They’re testing me, she realized anew. *And not just me. They’re testing Musashi as a whole.*

So she stated their plan as a response to that test.

“We will travel to Kantou, negotiate with Qing-Takeda, Satomi, Houjou, and – if possible – Sviet Rus to try to bring them over to our side. Our overall strength as a nation does not include just the Musashi itself. It includes the strength and influence we gain through the cooperation of other nations.”

And...

“On the way to Kantou, we will recreate the Battle of Mikatagahara with the help of Qing-Takeda.”

“Oh?” said Tomoe. “That’s quite a decision on Yoshitsune’s part. The Battle of Mikatagahara means the death of that idiot’s inherited name of Shingen.”

“But thanks to that, we can continue with our history recreation. Yes... That’s the starting line. Shingen will die and we will stand just before the Battle of Nagashino that leads to the fall of Takeda.”

Once Takeda fell, Nobunaga’s death would be close. Historically, he had travelled to and from Kyou but been killed by his retainer, Akechi Mitsuhide, at Honnouji before establishing his rule over the entire Far East.

“We’re going to owe a lot to Qing-Takeda.”

“But,” cut in Matsunaga with a tilt of the head. “You can’t rely on Satomi, Houjou, and Qing-Takeda forever. Musashi itself needs its own strength, doesn’t it?”

“We are already making the arrangements for that.”

Masazumi waved her right hand.

“Maa.”

A sign frame appeared in front of that hand and it displayed a line drawing.

“This was made on short notice, but these are the plans for the modifications we’ll have made at Kantou IZUMO.”

Everyone reacted with surprise and for good reason. The image of the Musashi based on Naomasa’s suggested design had a certain addition.

“We will arm the Musashi, including a main cannon. These are the plans for making the Musashi a combat-ready ship.”

“C’mon, now. I thought the Musashi had been disarmed.”

“We need to fight to defend ourselves. Plus, we need weapons when hired as a mercenary. But most importantly, we learned in England that we will sometimes have to fight in order to gain the Logismoí Óplo needed to stop the Apocalypse. So while these modifications are made, we will solidify our position in Kantou and then return here. And when we return, we will have the strength needed to get away with what I just mentioned.”

And...

“When that time comes, please test us again. You’re worried about Musashi’s strength as a nation, but I promise you that we will be strong enough once we return.”

No one immediately agreed or disagreed with her, but Tomoe was the first to move. She placed her hands on her crossed legs and gave a deep nod.

“That is enough. With that, I think I can expect something from you in the future. So at this point...”

Masazumi predicted Tomoe was going to call the meeting to a close, but...

“?”

A sign frame suddenly appeared next to her face and it contained a message from Neshinbara.

Novice: “Everyone, please remain calm and hear what I have to say. We just received word that the battle between K.P.A. Italia and M.H.R.R. has ended.”

They all turned around in surprise, but the report on the battle’s end was summed up quite succinctly.

Novice: “Itsukushima has fallen.”

Masazumi thought about what that meant.

...K.P.A. Italia lost?

They would have had many powerful fighters including the Pope-Chancellor, Galileo, and Tachibana Dousetsu, but Neshinbara had told them what had happened.

“The floating island of Itsukushima...was sunk and split down the middle?”

She had seen a portion of IZUMO break off and fall away the day before.

Itsukushima was a smaller floating island than IZUMO, but...

...How do you split something like that?

She had questions, but the footage from a PR committee member clearly showed what looked like two islands in the ocean below the dark clouds. Reports

of tsunami damage were coming in from the surrounding areas and the remaining K.P.A. Italia forces had sent out a statement saying they would continue their resistance.

“Wow,” said Asama. “The divine network is on the verge of overloading. ...Oh, sorry. I’ll switch it over to local mode for the time being!”

Several sign frames appeared around her and Hanami struck a few of them to shrink them.

Everyone exchanged a glance to see what the others would decide.

“That took some time getting here,” said Matsunaga. “I heard about it before I arrived.”

He took a more casual posture and looked up into Avalon’s sky as he spoke.

“Well, as ambassador, I’ll give you one last notification.”

“What is that?”

“Shaja.” He breathed out into the sky as if exhaling tobacco smoke. “Hashiba told me to say this. She said Musashi could easily bring in some supplies or mercenaries when it returned to Magdeburg, so she told me to make an announcement at the end of the meeting. Basically, the Sack of Magdeburg is beginning early.”

“...!?”

“Don’t look so shocked,” he said. “It’s beginning a day early, so tonight at eight. That’s two hours from now, right? Right. ...In two hours, the thirty thousand warriors laying siege outside will come rushing in.”

And at 6:12 PM, Matsunaga had completed his job as ambassador, so he and Suleiman left Magdeburg in his primary ship, the Shigisan. At the same time, the M.H.R.R. Catholics used a barrier to cut off all divine transmissions around Magdeburg.

Asama worked with Magdeburg’s academy to restore a Shinto base to the city’s divine transmission environment, but they could not contact anyone outside the city. Essentially, Magdeburg’s eyes and ears had been taken from

them in the darkness of the night.

However, they managed to salvage a few pieces of information from the transmissions sent in just before they were cut off.

The first was K.P.A. Italia's situation. Asama distributed it to everyone else.

"To Whom It May Concern,

How are you doing on this early summer day? Amen.

Thanks to your excellent guidance, we have just had the wonderful experience of defeat. Itsukushima was sunk and the Pope-Chancellor is missing, but all the more, the moderates are working toward a peaceful resolution while the resistors are heading out to the field to resist. Once that begins..."

"Is it just me, or is there a lot of sarcasm in this?"

"Heh heh heh. I do see some hints of resentment here and there. Flat politician, what do you think?"

"It's definitely an issue that the Pope-Chancellor is missing. That means the manager of the Catholic forces and the Testament Union nations is absent. The different nations will have to begin checking on and trying to take advantage of the situation."

Meaning...

"The European and Tsirhc nations won't be able to work together and that creates the perfect opening for Hashiba's group to interfere."

Another piece of information was the Musashi's status.

When the Musashi had been informed of the early start to the Sack of Magdeburg, it had still been in a city on the border with Holland while letting off the evacuees.

It would take eight hours to be towed all the way back to Magdeburg. Even if they left at 6:30 PM, they would only arrive the following morning at 4:30 AM. The divine mail from the Musashi just before transmissions were cut off had been short: "We will do our best to arrive as quickly as possible. Over."

The Musashi group in Magdeburg could only interpret those words for

themselves.

And at 6:30 PM, the entire city of Magdeburg was filled with a rush of reconsidering or reconstructing their defenses and a state of emergency was announced.

Novice: “The enemy could receive reinforcements or any number of other bad scenarios could play out, so whether the Musashi can arrive more quickly is going to be our lifeline here.”

Would Magdeburg last until then?

And Asama spoke for all of the Musashi residents there.

“I wonder what Toori-kun and the others are doing right now.”

Chapter 65: Slightly Heated Moaner

CHAPTER 65

"Slightly Heated Moaner"



What is by your side
Yet not by your side?
Point Allocation (Self-Discipline)

What is by your side

Yet not by your side?

Point Allocation (Self-Discipline)

A certain dark room was shaking.

The cramped, oblong room was actually the cabin of a carriage. The room was installed with two benches facing each other, the left side contained a curtained window and the right side contained curtained double doors.

The only sounds were those of turning axles, of overlapping horseshoes, and of voices beyond the thick curtain to the front.

“Okay, Ture-yan, we can get to Rudolf II’s tower with this, right?”

“We can. It should only take about an hour longer. But Miss Margot, you are surprisingly good at driving a carriage.”

“Well, my family used this kind of thing sometimes.”

Those two were up front in the coachman’s seat.

Mitotsudaira listened to them while sitting motionless in the cabin’s back seat.

The crossdressing idiot was fast asleep and leaning up against her.

...I-I must not interrupt his sleep!

Her characteristics as a beastman non-human left her feeling more alert at night. That and all the thoughts in her head kept her from sleeping.

...How can I sleep after that letter a bird delivered to my mother during our break?

It had informed them of K.P.A. Italia’s defeat and that the Sack of Magdeburg had been moved up to eight at night which was only about an hour and a half away.

This is not good, thought Mitotsudaira.

They wanted to confirm the information, but they could not use any wide-

range or base-point divine transmissions for fear of having the signal intercepted. And as they approached the Magdeburg region, they entered the effects of the M.H.R.R. Catholics' transmission blocking barrier, so any divine transmission grew staticky unless they were close enough to speak face-to-face anyway.

Based on what her mother had said during their break, they were still about half an hour away from Rudolf II's tower on the outskirts of Magdeburg. They needed to get Great Chancellor Carlos I's memo in the remaining hour and, according to Tenzou...

"We could always break into Magdeburg and meet up with the others there."

They had a single primary reason for doing something so dangerous.

"Most likely, the Hashiba and M.H.R.R. Catholic fleets in the K.P.A. Italia region will arrive from the south and they will attempt to sink the Musashi as an extension of the Sack of Magdeburg. The Testament Union cannot move with the Pope-Chancellor missing, so no one will stop them or see any reason to do so. The Musashi will need to keep its time in Magdeburg to an absolute minimum, so they will not have time to retrieve us outside the city."

"Couldn't you meet up with them later in order to protect your king?"

"Musashi's next stop is Edo in Kantou. If we wanted to meet up with them, we would have to pass through P.A. Oda."

"I see." Mitotsudaira's mother had nodded and smiled as she climbed onto the coachman's seat. "Then let us go with that. And I think we will help you out in a few ways. So if it proves too difficult...yes. Until Musashi secures its rule over Kantou and Tohoku and then returns to Europe, Hexagone Française could place you under our protection."

They certainly wanted to avoid that, but it did function as a backup plan just in case.

However, the idiot had muttered "A party in the candy house, hm?" with a perfectly serious expression.

...I-if I had to live with my king while surrounded by that smell, I think I would go insane.

“ ... ”

That smell had permeated her memories. It told her that her parents had spent some happy times together, but it also proved that her mother's story was completely accurate. It scared her when she remembered asking “Why did you scream if it felt good?” when she had heard the story as a child. She was also unsure what to think of her mother for answering “You'll understand when you're older.”

At any rate, she sighed in the dark cabin while supporting the crossdresser with her shoulder and she began to wonder how to spend the nearly half an hour until they arrived.

Tenzou and Mary sat in the opposite bench, but they were both leaning up against each other as they slept. At first, Tenzou had asked if he could get some sleep.

...It's quite something to hear the 1st special duty officer say that.

At the very least, she had never heard him say it before. She did think he had spent a sleepless night standing watch the night before and given what was to come...

...It's a little conceited to assume it's because he feels safe when we're with him, isn't it?

Not having her mother as an enemy was likely the biggest factor. Mary had initially let him lean on her while speaking with Mitotsudaira, but she had finally nodded off and now they were both gently leaning on each other.

Tenzou was pressing against Mary's breasts from below, but Naito had already recorded it. Once they returned to the Musashi and everything Naito had recorded in the past few days was released, it seemed certain that Tenzou would receive overkill levels of damage, but according to Naito...

“I'll release it bit by bit, so don't worry, Mito-tsan! Even Tenzou will be able to level up!”

If it was going to help him grow stronger, there was no arguing against it.

Anyway...

...Rudolf II's tower, huh?

I suppose my king will handle the negotiation while Tenzou and I support him. I have a feeling that isn't going to turn out well, but if it comes to a fight, mother or I will have to take over.

"I wonder what's going to happen."

Mitotsudaira looked out the carriage window.

A dark forest of thick trees surrounded them. The ground was covered with a complex mixture of fallen leaves and trees, but the headless horse-drawn carriage raced through it all without hitting anything and while only shaking slightly.

But it was not that the carriage was avoiding everything. The trees – even the largest of them – would move out of the carriage's way before it hit them. Meanwhile, the wheels spewed blue flames while leaping over any stones, slopes, bumps, or cracks.

"..!"

Some gentle wind carried a whinny into the carriage.

...How does that thing whinny?

She felt that asking would be admitting defeat, but then she saw some silver hair dancing outside the window.

It was her mother's.

Mitotsudaira looked away from the window and toward her mother in the coachman's seat up front.

In Europe, a headless horse-drawn carriage was a spirit of misfortune, so only someone on an even higher level could contain its power and control it as her own. In other words...

...Only the Reine des Garous can use this.

There was a procedure to follow, but if she called for this type of being, they would come. That was her right as a royal of a high-level non-human race.

And since the Reine des Garous and other Loup-Garous had lived in the forests and mountains without obeying the national boundaries, she knew a lot about the forests and mountains of M.H.R.R. despite her affiliation with Hexagone Française.

According to her...

“Normally, the M.H.R.R. Catholics would be watching the forests as well, but their focus on Magdeburg and K.P.A. Italia has left the western border shorthanded. The forests continue almost all the way to Magdeburg, so we should be able to follow them. If it comes to it, we can also run along the river.”

...This thing is fast.

For brief moments when they moved from the forest to a mountain ridge or leaped across a valley, the night sky would come into view.

They raced onward as if they were rolling uncontrollably down a hill.

Mitotsudaira only now realized why her mother was acting as their guide. Help from a high-level non-human royal allowed them to cross national borders without issue.

She saw Naito sitting next to her mother and navigating with a Magie Figur that displayed a hand-drawn map of M.H.R.R. Naruze had once made the map by drawing the landscape from the air and it had only been allowed because it qualified as a landscape drawing and not a map.

Naito knew the M.H.R.R. land, so she used a viewing spell to search out spots without any Catholic forces or aerial ships. Mitotsudaira's mother would then speed up to make up for the extra distance needed to circle around the Catholics.

They leaped across a valley and the carriage accelerated as soon as it landed. At the same time, the trees moved out of the way and the fleeing fairies would occasionally laugh loudly perhaps to hide their fear.

Mitotsudaira heard her mother laugh quietly out front and the fairies quieted down.

However, her mother then began to hum.

“Hm, hm, hm. I’m glad I have you with me, Margot. On my own, I probably wouldn’t have gone to all this trouble. I would have taken the most direct path and broken through any kind of checkpoint.”

“Well, I’m only doing this based on Tenzou’s advice. When dropping down from IZUMO, he checked on M.H.R.R’s terrain and on the movements of the ships, so he managed to work out the shortest route.” Naito laughed quietly. “I guess you could say our current situation is thanks to a combination of his good points and your good points. Those goods points don’t conflict at all, so I think we’ve gotten twice the speed out of it.”

...She summed that up well.

Tenzou had instructed Naito to work as navigator, but that must have been because he deemed her the best at giving Mitotsudaira’s mother instructions. With her mother alone, the odds were good she would intentionally charge right into a checkpoint to “have some fun”. And since Naito was used to moving quickly...

“C’mon, let’s speed up even more!”

She would egg Mitotsudaira’s mother on which allowed the woman to enjoy their reckless journey.

...Huh? I can rationally analyze this when I’m on my own?

She had a feeling that meant the carriage as a whole was not rational, but there was no point in thinking about it any further.

Meanwhile, she sensed her mother nodding in response to something Naito said. The curtain suddenly opened and the woman glanced at Tenzou and Mary.

“He is a reliable individual, isn’t he? ...He even calculated the angle at which I jumped down to catch up more quickly. To be honest, I didn’t expect for you to arrive until midday.”

Her smiling eyes then turned toward her daughter.

“Oh, Nate. You’re too skinny to make a proper bed for your king.”

“Wh-what are you talking about, mother!? Just focus on your conversation! There’s no need to start insulting me!”

Mitotsudaira bared her teeth as she spoke, but her mother only placed her hands on her cheeks and wiggled around.

“Oh, dear. My daughter is jealous that I’m talking with her classmate!”

She had let go of the reins to bring her hands to her cheeks, so the carriage made a large bounce. Naito frantically grabbed the reins and handed them to the woman, but Mitotsudaira was certain she briefly saw the bottom of a valley.

...Th-that was close!!

She only now realized what it meant to entrust her life to someone so capricious.

But when the carriage shook a bit as it stabilized, the boy next to her swayed and leaned further onto her. Before she could even think, his cheek pressed up against her shoulder and chest.

...Ehhhhh!?

With the wig on, one could almost mistake his face for a girl’s, but...

“...?”

His scent was different. No, she sensed a new scent on him.

It was her mother’s.

“...!?”

Mitotsudaira felt her eyebrows bend and strength enter her lower lip.

She detected her mother’s scent on him.

She normally only detected his and Kimi’s scents and more recently Horizon’s had joined the mix. Thanks to the Blue Thunder, Horizon’s scent was that of bread, bacon, and butter, so it was especially hard to bear on an empty stomach.

She also noticed Asama, Suzu, Masazumi, and something dog-like, but it was all overpowered by her mother’s scent. Not only that, but it was the scent of her lips.

“Kh...”

It was not a knight's place to ask what had happened the night before, but when she pictured Kimi and Horizon in her head, her mood took a truly regrettable turn. An awful sense that he had been "stolen" or "tainted" pushed up from the bottom of her heart.

So she brought her nose in close.

"..."

She looked forward and saw her mother speaking with Naito.

"So the M.H.R.R. broadcast committee's famous divine TV show 'Burnt at the Stake Around the World' really is done live? I had a feeling that part where they run around at the very end wasn't rehearsed."

"Next week, they're doing the Celtic version in England, so I wonder what's going to happen. The craftsmen have been getting pretty crazy lately."

Mitotsudaira wanted nothing to do with that conversation, but that only left...

...The 1st special duty officer and Mary.

The two had slipped from their previous position, so Tenzou's face was now pressed up against Mary's breasts. He risked suffocation, but he was probably getting a nice dream out of it. Mitotsudaira made a mental note to inform Naito later.

For the moment, she had other business to attend to.

"Nn."

Her nose twitched as she more closely observed his scent. The strongest scent was a nostalgic one of her mother's cooking. Salt and herbs were the primary seasonings and the meat was mostly deer or boar. But below that...

...Ah.

She detected the scent of her mother's skin as if the woman had held him in her arms. She also seemed to have wrapped her legs around him a bit, but...

...I-it doesn't seem like they were lying together!

Part of her felt she had let her imagination run too wild about her mother and king, but one was a capricious beast and the other was a nudist idiot. The latter

also seemed to be something of a heroine, so reality could be quite cruel.

At any rate, she found the scent of her mother's lips on his forehead, cheek, and neck, but it seemed their lips had never met.

"..."

She took a deep sigh of relief. She was mostly glad she did not have to share that kind of a secret with her king, but...

...My mother's scent...

The woman had clearly licked him and moved her lips across him.

The mere presence of that scent irritated her, but it especially angered her that it was on her king.

It felt like someone else had marked her king and it transformed her faintheartedness into anger.

So to erase her mother's scent, she brought her own lips and tongue in close.

"..."

But she stopped.

Her shoulders drooped and she pulled back a bit.

...I am his knight.

She was not a beast, she was not the princess who was meant to have this sort of intimacy, and she was not part of the family that supported him. In the group here, her role was in combat.

Once they returned to the Musashi, she could ask Kimi to have him take a bath or ask Tomo to purify him.

But just as she told herself this was not her role...

"Nn."

He shifted position and leaned even further up against her. She did not have large enough breasts to catch him like Mary did Tenzou, so he began to fall straight past her chest.

“...!?”

She frantically supported him in both arms as he collapsed face up.

...What is this!? Why am I holding him like a prince holds a princess in a school play!?

She remembered when they had done Snow White for a school play in elementary school. Asama had been tall back then too, so she had played the prince. Kimi had been wicked back then too, but for some reason, she had played the princess.

...After the princess ate the poisoned apple in the forest and stopped breathing, she for some reason shouted ‘Now! Give me CPR! Get that heart massage started!’ to the prince. That was a very dangerous play.

It had been so sudden that Asama had forgotten her lines and frozen up, so the idiot had walked out from behind the curtain. He had been naked but coated in melted chocolate and had worn a bundle of greens on his head.

“I’m a tree! A tree of the forest! But I’m a tree with a stamen! Okay! Topknot!”

He had started doing that indiscriminately, so Asama had shot him and brought peace back to the world just in time for the play to end.

Was the current pose meant to be revenge for his sister not getting her massage back then?

...N-no, calm down! This is a coincidence! Yes, a coincidence!!

She tried to correct their positions, but...

“...Nn.”

She relaxed when she heard him breathing in his sleep.

...Well, if he is comfortable, I suppose this is fine.

She checked again to make sure no one was paying any attention to her.

“ ... ”

And she gently brushed her cheek and throat on his forehead.

She knew this was just like a cat or dog marking its territory and she placed her

own scent on top of her mother's.

She decided she would have Kimi or Tomo get rid of it all once they returned to Musashi.

“So everyone has finally disembarked, have they?”

Lines of bookshelves filled the library on the starboard side of Musashi Ariadust Academy's first floor. Horizon sat in the seat in front of the counter and she closed her book after Heidi gave her a report on the situation.

The library's lights had already come on, but some children were still inside. The evacuation of Magdeburg and transportation of materials had left everyone so busy that a lot of children's parents had yet to return home.

Horizon handed the children some biscotti she had brought from the Blue Thunder and asked Heidi a question.

“So when can we return to Magdeburg?”

“I think we'll have to wait another two hours before we can leave. We have to unload the transport ships, unload the people, and unload the materials, so it's probably going to take some time.”

“In that case...”

Horizon placed a hand on her chin and saw Heidi place Erimaki on her head.

“It will take a total of ten hours to reach Magdeburg? By then, the Sack of Magdeburg will have ended and enemy reinforcements will have arrived from K.P.A. Italia.”

“That's true,” admitted Heidi while sitting on the counter and looking into the southern sky. “Hexagone Française has Anne of Austria and Mazarin there, the Protestants have Luther aka Tomoe Gozen and Mayor Guericke the Hemisphere Manufacturer there, and we have some of our people there. Whether they're partially eliminated or simply ‘protected’ will greatly affect the future situation in Europe.”

“It is a difficult situation,” muttered Horizon with a sigh.

Heidi suddenly tilted her head.

“Have you changed, Horizon?”

Horizon tilted her own head at that question about change.

“How would I have changed?”

“Oh, um...” Heidi opened sign frames and took care of some work as she spoke. “You’re still impatient because you want to go rescue Toori-kun, right?”

“Impatient? And ‘still’?”

“Judge.” Heidi’s bitter smile lost its bitterness. “Maybe it’s the influence of your new greed and sorrow. Are you impatiently greedy because you don’t want to experience sorrow?”

“I have no sense of it myself, but is that how I look?”

But then Horizon asked something else.

“Have you ever felt something like this?”

“I think we all did when we went to save you.”

Horizon slowly looked away from the girl and finally nodded.

“Judge. I see. I just found the answer to a mystery I had put on hold.”

“Oh, did I accidentally cause something amazing?”

“Judge. ...To be honest, even if I think back to then, I have a hard time judging Toori-sama’s true intentions because he camouflaged them behind so many irregular actions.”

Heidi averted her gaze when she heard that.

“Yeah...”

“But that too must have come from his impatience and his other emotions I have yet to obtain.”

“You should tell him that once he gets back.”

“Judge.” Horizon nodded and faced Heidi again. “Have you ever felt something

like that on a more individual level?”

“Hm. I think I’d like it if it was Shiro-kun that felt it instead of me.”

Horizon tilted her head in confusion, so Heidi smiled.

“A lot happened while you were gone.”

“Will you eventually tell me about it? If it happened while I was gone, then it is not something I absolutely must hear about.”

“Judge. It might help you figure out how to use your emotions once you get them all back.”

Heidi typed on her keyboard and tapped Erimaki’s head. The Mouse produced a new sign frame, but Heidi frowned when she read it.

“Ugh... I changed the transport ships’ descent pattern to speed up the process, but it actually slowed it all down...”

“Yes, something similar happened when I was trying to figure out the best way to place my new bread in the Blue Thunder’s oven. My first method fit the most in, but when I tried it again, it seemed impossible to reproduce.”

“Hmm. What to do? With this, it’s going to take us ten hours to reach Magdeburg. It’s seven in the evening now, so we won’t arrive until five in the morning.”

“The Sack of Magdeburg begins at eight, so we would be nine hours late.”

Just as Horizon frowned, a sign frame displaying Shirojiro appeared next to Heidi’s face.

“Heidi, I have brought the Commerce and Industry Guild under control. We will not be transporting the materials. That allows the Musashi to leave two hours early.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“When sending down Magdeburg’s people, we had planned to load the transport ships with materials for the Musashi, but that has been cancelled. We will leave the transport ships here and let the people use them as temporary housing. That should allow the Musashi to begin moving right away. Please

rearrange the schedule.”

Horizon tilted her head at their exchange.

“Shirojiro-sama is passing up a chance to make money? Has he gone insane?”

“Shiro-kun! Shiro-kun! Did you hear what she said!?”

“Just to be clear, I have not forgotten about the money,” said Shirojiro while crossing his arms. “I have bought the ships we are leaving behind and their previous owners will use those funds to help buy new transport ships in Kantou IZUMO. ...Of course, I have already bought up all of Kantou IZUMO’s transport ships.”

“Way to go, Shiro-kun! You’re so wonderfully cruel!! That darkness makes the glint of gold appear all the more beautiful!!”

Over the sign frame, the treasurer duo formed a yen symbol with their fingers and ended the conversation.

Horizon watched as Heidi sighed and opened a new calculation sign frame.

“This is becoming something of a puzzle, but I guess I have to work at solving it,” she said. “We can’t cruise over M.H.R.R., so it’s still going to take eight hours to reach Magdeburg even if we shorten it by two hours.”

Just as she leaned back on the counter, Horizon spoke up.

“Judge. Then how about I search for a way of fixing that? And I have an idea who might be the best one for the job. Until then, you continue coordinating everything, Heidi-sama.”

“Eh?” asked Heidi.

Horizon nodded expressionlessly.

“If something is frustrating you, I believe you should take action to deal with it.”

Chapter 66: Viewers of the Metal Tower

CHAPTER 66

"Viewers of the Metal Tower"



What can only
Be whispered about?

Point Allocation (It'll be found out eventually)

What can only

Be whispered about?

Point Allocation (It'll be found out eventually)

The tower simply stood there.

“Is it just me or does this thing look really fake?” asked the crossdresser.

The metal tower pierced up into the night. The base was thirty meters across and as for its height...

“I’ve heard it is five hundred meters tall,” said Tenzou as he looked around.

They stood on a hill. It gave them an excellent view and a forest and village were located at the bottom of the hill. They had left the carriage in the forest and spent a few minutes walking the rest of the way.

...But there was no defensive wall.

Perhaps to house guards, a few small, decorated buildings were located around the tower and they were all connected by a wall. Another wall surrounded the tower outside those buildings, but neither wall was tall enough to be any defense.

“I see.” Tenzou crossed his arms and turned to the Reine des Garous who was also looking up at the tower.

“Reine des Garous-dono, does M.H.R.R. have no intention of protecting Chancellor Rudolf II? I can think of no other explanation for sending the Catholic chancellor to Protestant land.”

“I believe the information and facts you already have cover that. The chancellor and student council president were given their positions due to their family, but the elder brother turned away from politics just as his historical counterpart did. He immersed himself in Technomagic and the arts and was confined to his residence while his brother faced the Thirty Years’ War as a puppet. However...”

The Reine des Garous shrugged.

“From what I’ve heard, Rudolf II was all for the move to this tower.”

“Really?” asked Mary as she stepped up next to Tenzou.

She may have been interested because she herself had essentially been imprisoned for a time.

She wrapped her arms around Tenzou’s arm and asked the Reine des Garous a question.

“Does Chancellor Rudolf II think he is unwanted?”

“That’s a good question.”

Tenzou saw the Reine des Garous narrow her eyes at Mary’s question.

“I think most everyone has thought that at some point or another. ...Of course, that’s just a personal worldview.”

Those words pushed Tenzou to look at Mary.

She seemed to think for a few moments but eventually bent the scar on her cheek and nodded.

“Judge. Thank you very much. ...That’s right. I think both Chancellor Rudolf II and you are normal people just like us.”

“Testament.” The Reine des Garous’s eyes bent as she smiled toward Mary. “I would say it is especially true of someone from the House of Habsburg like Rudolf II. So many other families want that bloodline, so their personality is often completely ignored.”

“I can imagine so,” said Tenzou as he and Mary nodded.

...The House of Habsburg, huh?

Rudolf II and his brother Matthias were from that well-known house that had its origins in Switzerland and formed the foundation for M.H.R.R.’s southern principalities and Tres España’s ruling family.

Rather than focusing on a single nation, they let their “house” stretch between nations so they could all prosper.

...In a way, you could say they're trying to unify Europe through a bloodline rather than a nation.

Europe was filled with war, but the bonds between two nations were much stronger when their rulers came from the same house. So any nation ruled by the Habsburgs would send more Habsburgs to other nations through political marriages, avoid war between the same house, and work together to develop further.

And because the foundation of that development came from the bloodline...

"They are a...prolific house, aren't they?"

Their house motto came from the fact that Habsburg women were said to have many children.

"I think it was 'Let others wage war. You, lucky Austria, shall marry!'."

That had been said by Maximilian I, the M.H.R.R. chancellor who had brought the imperial throne to the Habsburg family. Mercenaries had been the stars of the battlefield during the late middle ages and he had gained the support of those mercenaries, but he was still popular in the middle ages genre of porn games. Tenzou was fairly certain the most recent title was "The Final Middle-Aged Knight", but displaying that house motto at the end had become the tradition, especially when the player made the wrong choices and reached an unmarried ending.

...It really gets to you after an NTR ending.

Mary then tugged on his arm, so he turned to see what she wanted.

"Master Tenzou, you have a game with those words in it, don't you? You wouldn't let me see very much of it, but were you studying for today?"

...Giving me that impressed look makes it hard to know what to say, Mary-dono. I mean, look behind you. Mitotsudaira-dono and Naito-dono are gesturing for me to come over there.

He ignored the gestures, but he did look back and forth between the Reine des Garous and Mitotsudaira.

"But Hexagone Française didn't want any interference from the Habsburgs and

their strong M.H.R.R. influence, so you set up a dynasty with the House of Bourbon, didn't you?"

"Testament. That is why we have to take the Thirty Years' War so seriously. Ever since the middle ages, the Habsburgs have been attempting to rule Europe, but Hexagone Française will stop them. When you get down to it, that is what we are fighting over."

"I see," said the girls.

Mary and Mitotsudaira had their connections to other nations via family or inherited name, so this topic was closely connected to them.

Tenzou decided not to avoid this kind of topic in the future and to instead discuss it over tea with a newspaper in one hand.

"Anyway, Chancellor Rudolf II seems like a complicated individual."

He looked up at the tower and noticed the only windows were on the stairway circling along the outer edge. The very top was solid wall.

"What do you think is going to happen here, Toori-dono?"

He looked over but found the crossdressing idiot had vanished. *Oh?* he wondered as he looked around and spotted him by the entrance to the tower on the surrounding wall.

"Heyyy! Get over here, everyone! They say they'll tell us how to get in!!"

"Ahhhhh! Why are you starting this on your own!?"

Tenzou pulled on Mary's hand and walked over.

"This is enemy territory, so it is too dangerous to act on your own!"

"What!? Acting on my own!? But you do that all the time! Like when you sit in the corner of the room and grin while imagining Mary naked."

"Oh, my."

Mary placed her hands on her blushing cheek, but the real danger was Naito recording both that and the breasts trapped between Mary's elbows.

“Mary-dono?” he said so only she could hear. “Wh-while that may be...a little true, it’s, um, inappropriate.”

“Eh? Oh, judge! I-I suppose it would be. In public at least. Yes.”

Now that he had her understanding, he could make a show of denying it.

“I-I do not do that! Isn’t that right, Mary-dono!”

“Y-yes. Master Tenzou would never do something so inappropriate. He has no interest in his wife’s body and he always focuses on his games when I’m changing. Not that I would mind if he looked.”

Mitotsudaira and Naito started gesturing him over.

The Reine des Garous also said “oh, my” with a hint of warning in her voice.

“What is this about not imagining your wife naked?” she asked him. “Listen. When you see your beloved, it doesn’t matter what they are wearing or if they are in another room. You need to use their scent to imagine every inch of their body and your imagination cannot stop until you have pictured how you will intertwine your bodies, take them into your mouth, and offer yourself up to them. And I am not talking about later that night; I mean five seconds later.”

“W-wait, mother! That’s taking this way too far!!”

But Mary must not have known what the women meant because she tilted her head. All the same, she blushed and smiled at the Reine des Garous.

“I don’t mind if you don’t imagine me,” she told Tenzou. “After all, you can actually look at me whenever you want.”

She averted her gaze a little and smiled.

“You still haven’t taken a good look, but...have you been looking without me noticing? I know I toss and turn in my sleep a lot, but my blanket has never fallen off by morning.”

...That is far too dangerous to mention without getting into the details!!

“Ohh?”

Naito and Mitotsudaira glared at him from behind Mary and Naito gave an extremely wooden comment.

“I neeeeeever would have thought you were so kind, Tenzou.”

“You only look at her in her sleep? That’s just creepy.”

Th-that is not the case! I asked the female kobolds to fix her blanket for five yen a night! I haven’t been looking! Not to mention that she likes to hold things in her sleep, so she holds the blanket in place. She sometimes grabs one of the kobolds and it gets too tangled in the blanket to escape.

...She is so lovely.

But the next thing he knew, Naito was recording from behind Mary and Mitotsudaira was checking over the footage with a glare. And from beyond them...

“Heyyy! Hurry up!”

The crossdresser was calling them, so Tenzou pulled on Mary’s hand and continued that way.

Mitotsudaira hurried toward the wall surrounding the tower and heard Naito say that Tenzou had escaped. It did not take long for the idiot to come into view.

“What is it, chanc-...no, um...”

He was crossdressing and she wanted to believe it was a disguise and not his personal preference. However, she was not sure what to call him in that case.

“Oh, c’mon, Nate! My name is Pressie! Call me Pressie!!”

Was that supposed to come from his position as student council president?

Anyway, Naito gave her opinion as she too lined up in front of the tower.

“How about Miss Wit? First name: Dim.”

“Oh, I guess my idea of Miss Stupid was a little too direct.”

“Our girls are surprisingly harsh,” added Tenzou.

At any rate, the idiot was speaking with someone standing at the center of the path leading to the tower. Mitotsudaira looked to the person standing beyond him.

...A noble?

The woman wore an M.H.R.R. girl's uniform as a dress. She gave a kindhearted smile and another woman stood near the wide-open entrance to the tower.

"This is looking a lot like a brothel to me."

Naito sounded concerned, but the woman speaking with the crossdresser only smiled.

"Surely you are at least prepared for that if you came here. Whether day or night, Master Rudolf is always searching for a partner. But by this point, plastering the neighboring city with posters isn't enough to bring anyone in."

The tall, well-built woman who seemed to be standing guard at the entrance nodded.

"Master Rudolf's policy is to never turn anyone away. If you will provide him some entertainment, then please continue. Or are you here to take someone back?"

At that point, she smiled bitterly.

"Surely you did not think you could simply make a casual visit."

...Eh? Does this mean...?

Mitotsudaira could not help but gulp.

"Ehhhh!? This is that kind of mission!?"

She turned around and found the idiot gesturing her over.

She ran over and the idiot began a scrum with the others.

"Good, girl. Now, stay, stay."

"Nate, how are you treated on the Musashi?"

"N-not like this! I assure you!"

At any rate, the idiot, Mitotsudaira's mother, and everyone else joined the strategy scrum. First, the mother nodded calmly.

"How about we just climb on up and kill him?"

“M-mother, why do you always jump to the most extreme option?”

“Then are you volunteering to go, Nate?”

She could not help but fall silent at that.

“We have no choice,” said the idiot. “I guess I’ll go.”

“Eh!? Wh-what are you talking about, chancellor!? If Musashi’s chancellor had that kind of...fabulous relationship with another academy’s chancellor, it would be like having a black belt in International Shudo and his approval rating would drop like a rock!”

“You really get worked up sometimes, you know that?”

“Personally, I think people would just think it’s one of his usual physical comedy routines.”

Mitotsudaira nearly agreed with Naito but stopped herself. Regardless, the idiot scratched his head and glanced over at Mitotsudaira.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. ...But while it’s true something might happen, Maman is way too strong when she gets serious and Tenzou would be ignored from the get-go.”

“D-did you have to throw an insult in there!?”

“What!? If you don’t like it, then get to crossdressing! I’ve definitely got the upper hand in life compared to some hat boy who can’t even crossdress!”

So you have an upper hand in a race to the bottom? wondered Mitotsudaira. And...

“Chancellor, um, well...”

“Call me Pressie. You promised, remember?”

He quieted down when everyone glared at him, but then they slapped him on the back to get him speaking again.

“Anyway... Mary’s definitely not an option here, right?”

“?”

Mary did not seem to understand what any of this meant, but there was no

helping that.

“And Gold Mar isn’t an option either,” continued the idiot.

“Yeah, I have Ga-chan.”

“Right? So that leaves me.”

The idiot left the scrum and turned his back. He looked to the tower, got down in a bowlegged crouch, and pulled on the crotch of his clothing to adjust the position. Finally, he slapped himself on the butt.

“Okay, I’ll be going. I’ll probably be back late, but wait to eat until I’m back.”

“Y-you are awful!” shouted Tenzou. “This guy is just plain awful!”

“No, um, w-wait a minute!”

Mitotsudaira frantically called out to him. He had already been licked all over by her mother, so if he was taken away by that side of things as well, she would be a disgrace to the title of knight. And so she spoke more on reflex than as a thought-out decision.

“I will go!!”

Mitotsudaira shouted without thinking, but...

...Ah.

She was ashamed that part of her regretted the decision.

But she saw the crossdresser turn around in front of her and he looked to her with the ends of his eyebrows lowered.

“Nate...”

“Wh-what?”

“Judge.”

The idiot hung his head, placed his hands on her shoulders, lowered them, and then groped her.

“You just don’t have the chest to pull it off.”

She swung down a fist and embedded the idiot in the earth.

The Seto Inland Sea drifted in the dark night.

A victory celebration was underway in front of the aerial ships that had landed on the beach.

The revelers wore M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda uniforms.

They were celebrating the defeat of K.P.A. Italia by the southern warriors of the M.H.R.R. Catholics, Hashiba, and P.A. Oda.

The boundaries between nation and religion were crossed on that beach, the bonfires illuminated countless figures, and Garudas and Djinnns were sent flying around by celebratory fireworks spells.

The religious gap created a difference in foods that divided the festival stands, but both sides spoke with each other and the beach was perfect for drawing out diagrams to review the battle.

They bragged or talked more rationally, but they were all after the sense of liberation brought on by making such a racket.

There was plenty of music and dancing and the groups of girls were especially loud as they got into fights and hit back.

But in contrast to the commotion below, the ships moored on the beach remained entirely dark.

However, a table was set up next to the railing on the bow of the largest ship in the center.

“Matthias, you did well today.”

“Well done.”

Matthias turned toward a red uniform as he cut his nails with a knife he pulled from his pocket.

“Well done? Well, I’m sure you’re just being polite, but I didn’t really do anything, Maeda. It was all of you that did all the work. ...Speaking of which, I heard Kuki was hurt pretty badly. Will he be okay?”

“Testament. The bleeding has been stopped and he is speaking with the health committee about whether they should regenerate the arm or create a new one. Anyway, he is the kind of person who will be honored to hear you were concerned about him, so that is enough.”

“You all really are amazing. And...”

Matthias sat in a chair he carried over to the edge of the deck and asked a question of the red uniform.

“Maeda, are you headed north like me?”

Toshiie nodded, as did Matsu on his shoulder. He then approached the edge of the deck while wrapped in a faint light.

“You don’t have to go to Magdeburg if you don’t want, Matthias.”

“I’m worried about my brother, though. Not that I think he would meet with me.”

“That’s a tricky situation. ...But from what I had heard, Chancellor Rudolf II was the one distancing himself from you.”

“Well, he has no desire for fame or anything else, so he’s the normal one. I’m the one at fault. Historically, Rudolf II so loved chivalry, Technomagic, and the arts that he never gave any thought to his nation.”

Matthias crossed his arms and smiled bitterly.

“But I ended up being the one that preferred chivalry and pretending to be a king. And while we’re at it, I also seem to like pretending to be a Sengoku commander. After all, I’m about to supplant my superior.”

“Matthias... Chancellor Rudolf II is...”

“Testament.” Matthias nodded. “My brother isn’t the type to die that easily. He wouldn’t be when he was born from the history of the Habsburgs. He is their one and only success. And...that means no one can ever understand him. Which is why everyone refers to him as a Wahnsinniger.”

He then changed the subject.


“Now, let’s get going to Magdeburg. It might be over by the time we get there,

but we still need to go bring an end to my brother's era."

Chapter 67: Searcher in the Metal Tower

CHAPTER 67

"Searcher in the Metal Tower"



What resembles the smell of blood
Resembles the taste of blood
Yet is harder than blood?
Point Allocation (Iron)

What resembles the smell of blood

Resembles the taste of blood

Yet is harder than blood?

Point Allocation (Iron)

The imprisoning tower was made of iron. The floors, walls, staircase, hallways, and even the chairs in the landings were all made of hard metal.

“They certainly were thorough.”

Mitotsudaira heard her voice and footsteps echoing through the metal spiral staircase. The well-built female guard at the entrance had insisted they enter one at a time, so she had gone in alone.

...I knew it was meant as a prison, but I didn't expect it to be this sturdy.

The torches and the cloth covers on the chairs were the only non-metal materials. The only other things not made of metal were...

...Me as I climb the stairs, and...

Occasionally, she would see someone collapsed on the landings or in the chairs placed in the viewing hallways.

Their clothes were disheveled, their skin exposed, and they were gasping for breath.

...I-is this, um, what I think it is?

She could easily hear the heavy breathing and faint voices in the quiet hallways and staircases. The gentle voices echoed off the walls with an intoxicated quaver to them.

“Master Rudolf... You're so wonderful...”

“You're just so rough...”

“I don't think my body can survive much more of this...”

...Ehhh!? That's really what's going on here!?

Mitotsudaira very nearly stopped walking, but she instead quickly moved past

those women while briefly glancing over at them.

...N-negotiate! I need to negotiate! He'll understand if I explain the situation!

But what if he demanded her body in exchange for the memo?

"Then..."

She had prepared herself for this from the moment she volunteered to go. This was not a knight's job, but a knight could not allow her king or another lady to be defiled.

But even so, she was certainly not enthusiastic about this job and had only volunteered by process of elimination.

That may have been why he had spoken to her as she had started to regret her decision.

"Hey, Nate. You don't have to go, you know? I'm not gonna force anyone to do something they don't want to. ...Hey, Tenzou. Drinks. Three minutes, okay?"

"Y-you're contradicting everything you just said!"

But once Tenzou returned with drinks in paper cups he had bought at the Thales-style vending machine located next to the tower, Mitotsudaira had taken one and spoken to the idiot.

"What do you mean I don't have to go? If I don't, we won't get this material on the Princess Disappearances. Not to mention that Hexagone Française asked us to perform this investigation."

"Don't worry about it, don't worry about it." He had waved his hand dismissively. "You know that thing that sounds like a tragic event from a porn game? Was it called the Sack of Magdeburg? Well, once it's over, this Rud-whatever guy will go away, right? I'm sure the entire tower will be abandoned, but we can always have that cruel merchant buy the memo afterwards. Or if he takes it with him, we can search him out, have Itoken exercise with him, and get it that way. He apparently loves Technomagie, so Itoken might get a bit dispelled, though."

"If that happened, I think our class would get a little less chaotic."

As they had spoken, she had started feeling more inclined to go. It was less

about knowing she did not have to go and more about knowing her king was worried about her. She felt honored but also felt inexperienced for making him worry.

“So I suppose I came here to prove I’m a proper knight.”

She sighed as she climbed the stairs.

...Did they say this tower is five hundred meters tall?

She could see the distant landscape out the occasional arrow slit or window. She could tell she was climbing higher because that landscape grew wider and wider.

“This feels like mountain climbing.”

There had been an elevator that used spirit spells on the first floor, but she had chosen not to use it when she did not know where it would take her. There were elevator entrances on each consecutive floor, but they seemed to be for the residents in the waiting rooms and required special keys to unlock. In other words, she had made the wrong decision at the very beginning.

...How long has it been since I climbed this high on foot?

Musashi’s total height was about one hundred sixty meters. She would run up to Musashino’s bridge during training, but she decided she needed to train more in vertical movement.

She sighed again, placed both heels on the floor, and gathered her strength.

She looked to the wall and saw a metal plate that said “Not far now to Chancellor Rudolf II’s room!”

And after she finished climbing that flight of stairs...

“It really isn’t far.”

The hallway ahead curved gently and ended with only an elevator entrance and a large metal door.

Mitotsudaira sighed yet again and took a light step straight up.

She jumped, landed, and realized her body was a bit weak.

It was partially due to the extent of the climb, but it was also true she had rushed a little too much. At any rate, she checked the elevator and peered down from the window.

...Oh, I'm not that high up.

She was only able to think that due to the view she normally had from the Musashi. She also felt more relaxed than when closer to the ground, but that too may have come from being a resident of Musashi.

...There was a time when I constantly told myself I wasn't one.

She exhaled, breathed in new air, reached for the knocker on the large door, and told herself she needed to give a proper greeting as Musashi's representative.

"Now, then."

She pulled back the knocker and swung it forward.

But that light action was enough to move the large door before she could knock.

The door opened and darkness spread out before her eyes.

...Eh?

Not only had it not been locked, but it had not been properly closed. Pulled by the opening door and the knocker, she took a few steps into the room. And...

"...Ah."

Oh, no, she thought, fearing they would think she had opened the door without even trying to knock. She feared they would think she had failed to follow the proper etiquette of a visitor.

But then her nose detected a certain scent: blood and other bodily fluids.

"...!?"

All of her body's hair bristled because this scent did not come from a cow or a pig; it was a human scent.

She smelled human blood, human flesh, and the fluids released when human organs spilled out, but it was far too much to come from a single person.

“Kh.”

To put up her guard, she quickly began to move back, but her back struck something.

It was the door. Once she realized the door had closed at some point, a tremor of caution filled her body. This was undoubtedly a dangerous situation, so she crouched down and swiftly turned her senses to her surroundings.

The room was just below thirty meters across. It had no windows and it had what looked like a giant bed in the center, but something else concerned her more.

...What is this scent?

There was more here than just the smell of bodily fluids like blood and sweat. A strong, familiar scent was mixed in with the metallic smell covering the walls and everything else.

“Maintenance oil?”

It was the type used on weapons and it was a constant smell aboard the Musashi.

Just as she wondered why the room smelled so strongly of it, a sudden light reached her.

A light panel using holy spells was installed at the center of the ceiling and it lit up the entire room.

The object below the light was not a bed. It was a square stage with short posts at each corner. It looked like a metal pedestal and three horizontal chains connected the posts to cover all four sides.

Also, a thick figure stood in the very center. He had a well-balanced body that almost looked carved from stone, he wore an M.H.R.R. uniform, and he was looking her way.

His facial features and build were solid, his hair was long and blond, his face was adorned with a mustache, and his sharp gaze was trained on her.

But the man had one difference from a normal M.H.R.R. boy: he wore a girl's uniform.

...Eh?

Mitotsudaira reacted with a question instead of confusion or surprise.

"A guy?"

"Heh. Well done making it this far, my new challenger!!"

The muscles below the girl's uniform moved more than necessary as he crossed his arms and thrust out his chest.

"I am M.H.R.R. Chancellor Rudolf II!"

"Matthias, we'll be leaving now."

"Leaving."

"Ha ha ha. Maeda, you and Matsu always get along so well."

"We do," said Toshiie as the ship began to float and the deck vibrated.

"There's something I've been wondering, though. Chancellor Rudolf II is known as a Wahnsinniger, but why exactly?"

"Oh, that. Well, there are a lot of reasons."

Matthias put his nail-grooming knife back in his pocket and smiled.

"But the thing about my brother is...he's a real deviant."

Mitotsudaira stood before the Wahnsinniger.

...Um...

She was so busy wondering what exactly she was looking at that she was unable to react when the man named himself. However, crossdressing Rudolf released his tightly crossed arms and pointed at her with both hands.

"You are Nate Mitotsudaira, Musashi's 5th special duty officer and the Reine des Garous's daughter, correct?"

“How do you know that!?”

“Ohhhh!? I may be actively imprisoned here, but with such a tall tower, all sorts of divine transmissions come pouring in! They’re all cut off at the moment, though!”

Anyway...

“I know you were beaten to a pulp.”

He nodded and narrowed his eyes.

“You poor thing.”

“M.H.R.R. Chancellor.”

She raised her right hand and cut him off.

This man was a Wahnsinniger, but he was still human. If he could say cruel things, her words would be able to reach him and there was no need to reply to his provocation. She was here on official business, so she lowered to one knee.

“I have come to visit you with a request from Musashi’s Chancellor and Student Council President and from Hexagone Française. To stop the Apocalypse which is quickly becoming an international problem and to pursue the truth of the related Princess Disappearances, I would like to borrow Chancellor Carlos I’s memo.”

“My, my. You certainly are-...”

“Are you willing to do that?”

She cut him off again and she could sense some real irritation inside herself, so she glanced up at him.

...He definitely is muscular, but...

Persona-kun had him beat in pure muscle volume and Urquiga probably had a similar level of strength, so she saw no reason to fear him if it came to a fight.

...But what is this smell of blood and other bodily fluids?

Her only guess was Technomagie. If he really was obsessed with it, he would need animal blood and flesh for offerings.

However, this scent came from humans. She could only imagine humans had been torn to pieces here.

“ ... ”

But was the man she saw here really someone who would do that?

...Is he?

She did not know, so she spoke while preparing herself to overpower him if it came to it.

“Let me ask again. Might we borrow Carlos I’s-...”

“You mean this?”

He teasingly held up a piece of parchment, rubbed it against the cheek of his square face, and looked to Mitotsudaira.

“You cannot have it. ...I might think about it on certain conditions, though.”

She frowned at the word “conditions” and remembered the people collapsed in the stairways and corridors on the way up.

“U-um... You mean...my body?”

“Yes, that’s right. Your body. ...You will need to use your body for me.”

...Ehhhhh!?

She truly did take a half step back, but Rudolf kept his sharp gaze on her.

“Yes, that’s right. I need you to be my sparring partner.”

“What!?”

That unexpected term filled her heart with confusion, but her body managed to react.

She stood up as she thought about what he meant by “sparring partner”, but...

“ ... ”

Rudolf II had vanished from the center stage.

Before she could even wonder where he had gone, something struck her from behind.

Chapter 68: Manager of the Metal Tower

CHAPTER 68

"Manager of the Metal Tower"



What does not show its true form?
What does not reveal its true form?
What does not know its true form?
Point Allocation (Oneself)

What does not show its true form?

What does not reveal its true form?

What does not know its true form?

Point Allocation (Oneself)

Even with Mitotsudaira's senses, the attack was sudden.

It was only after being hit that she only realized it was a quick heel of the palm.

"!?"

She gave a confused cry as she flew through the air.

She had been standing before the large door, so there had not been anyone behind her.

And the attack that had bent her back had come from a woman's hand, not Rudolf II's.

"An ambusher!?" The palm strike felt slender and even soft, but it still knocked her toward the stage. She spun her body around to orient herself in midair, flipped toward the floor about three meters from the stage, and landed sharply on her heels.

She took a defensive stance and glanced around cautiously.

...He had someone waiting for me, didn't he!?

She turned around to look in a full three hundred sixty degrees. The stage reflected the light and revealed what was located around it.

Weapons decorated the room in a radial pattern. Longswords, spears, hammers, maces, mauls, scythes, any number of other weapons were displayed in metal stockers.

They were all lined up within arm's reach of the stage.

Mitotsudaira realized the maintenance oil she had noticed was coming from these weapons. That meant the weapons were used and maintained.

"Wh-what is this!?"

“You don’t know?”

She heard a female voice from back and to the right, but just as she turned to the right, someone grabbed her left arm.

...The other side!?

The thick fingers of the hands on her left arm were clearly those of a man. And...

“Sorry about the feint.”

Mitotsudaira heard Rudolf II’s voice before her back slammed into the side of the stage.

Mitotsudaira’s back collided with the side of the metal stage.

...Kh!

Before she could bounce off, she jumped forward to escape the stage.

But...

“You mustn’t run.”

She heard yet another female voice from the stage behind her.

...How many people are hidden around here!?

She then heard someone jump toward her from the stage.

She responded by making a quick backhand blow back and to the right.

She decided they were coming from the right because of the shadow cast on the floor. The light panel on the ceiling was positioned directly above the stage, so the enemy’s shadow fell toward her when the stage was behind her. And currently, the shadow on the floor had leaped toward her right side.

“There!”

She showed no mercy as she thrust her forearm out, but...

“You have good senses.”

She felt a downward gust of wind behind her on the right. The enemy had

lowered their hips as soon as they landed and thus avoided Mitotsudaira's attack.

Her jab shot by over her opponent's head and she got a look at the opponent while pulled forward by her arm.

...It really is a woman!?

She recognized the woman. She was the well-built one from the tower's entrance.

"Ambushes are not fair!"

"Oh, this is perfectly fair."

The woman charged forward to tackle her.

"...!"

So she further accelerated her arm and used its pull to turn toward the enemy.

She twisted her hips around, raised her left knee toward the woman, and performed a stomping kick. She aimed for the woman's face as a counterattack.

The forceful twisting of her body paid off when the attack hit.

She heard the high-pitched sound of a slap and felt powerful elasticity on the bottom of her foot. She used the force reaching her knee to leap backwards.

It had been a solid blow. It had felt strong enough to smash the woman's face and it had been powered by a Loup-Garou's leg strength. She had to give the woman credit for holding her ground and not being knocked back, but that was exactly why she had taken her leap.

And while in midair, Mitotsudaira reformed a defensive stance and looked to her opponent.

...How was that!?

For just an instant, the force of the counterattack nearly knocked the woman to the floor, but...

"Well done!"

She stopped herself by taking a stance similar to a crouch start. She held her

right hand to her face while thin trails of blood escaped the fingers and dripped to the floor.

Her face had been crushed. The entire right half had shifted toward her ear in the shape of a boot print. The muscles of her face were partially peeled from the bone, but they were still fixed in place from the tension of the blow. The outline of the boot print formed a crack in the skin running from between the eyebrows down to the jaw and blood spilled from that crack.

“Yes...”

The woman used her fingers to force her broken nose back into place and ran straight toward Mitotsudaira.

“I will not hold back!!”

Mitotsudaira did not need to reply because she had not been holding back in the first place. As she landed, she pulled a metal spear from one of the weapon stockers. The decorated weapon was three meters long.

She forcibly spun the spear around in her hand. The metal seemed no heavier than a tree branch in the powerful grip of a Demi Loup-Garou. The metal shaft bent as she swung it around at high speed, but just as the tip pointed forward...

“You asked for this, so you have no one to blame but yourself!”

She let go of the shaft, quickly moved her palm behind the spear, and grasped the bottom. She then pushed the bottom of the spear straight toward the tip.

“Take this!”

She launched the spear toward the woman’s face.

A moment later, Mitotsudaira saw her enemy move.

Beyond the spear she had thrown, the woman shifted slightly to the right. She seemed to have caught sight of the spear with her crushed and bent half face, so Mitotsudaira assumed she was ducking out of the way.

“Heh hehhh!!”

However, the woman twisted her body just a bit and ran toward the spear.

She was letting it hit her.

...What!?

Mitotsudaira was already beginning her next move on the assumption that the woman would duck, so this was unexpected.

However, the enemy completed her action. The spear flew toward her right collar bone and the tip instantly stabbed through her and out her right side. The enemy had been pumping her arms as she ran and she used that motion to grab the tip as it burst out her side.

“———!”

Before the spear lost its momentum, she pulled it out into the air behind her.

Mitotsudaira heard the wet scraping sound as the object was pulled from the woman's flesh and she saw blood spraying back with the weapon.

However, the spear was indeed thrown back behind the woman, and...

“Excellent!”

The woman's charge did not slow. She used the momentum of her entire body to crush the impact. As for the pain...

...Does she not feel pain!?

With sharp, instantaneous attacks, sometimes one's nerve could not transmit the signal quickly enough or the nerves themselves would tremble and no pain would be felt.

But this woman had consciously pulled the spear from her body. If her nerves were functioning enough to take that kind of action, she should have felt the pain of the spear being removed.

“Since you didn't feel it...do you have no sense of pain!?”

“That's right! You only now caught on!?”

Of course she had. This was her first time against an opponent like this. However, she was well aware of this kind of condition. After all...

...It shows up all the time in Neshinbara's weird novels!

Some people's nervous system did not transmit pain signals.

And one unique characteristic was their inability to regulate their strength.

Whenever a human did anything, they instinctually tried to protect their own body. When holding something sharp, the pain in their skin told them to loosen their grip. That was a combination of pain and instinctual self-defense.

But those without a sense of pain did not feel any pain or recoil, so they could draw out the kind of strength that a normal human never could because it would destroy their own body.

That was how the woman had endured the previous kick. It was also how she had pulled out the spear and maintained her charge.

And so Mitotsudaira did not hesitate in her next move. Her timing was thrown a little off, but she could overcome that with brute strength.

"Honestly! That's an ambusher for you!"

She pulled a large hammer from one of the stockers and performed a full rightward swing toward the side of the approaching woman's face.

"I should have expected something like this!!"

She felt the blow land, the woman's entire body spun like a top, and the woman slammed into the stockers on the left.

Mitotsudaira heard a loud crash to the left.

The line of metal stockers there had been hit hard enough to dent a few, bend a few, and knock a few of them from their bases. The solid sounds of the impacts continued and the stocked weapons sparkled in the light as they flew through the air.

"I'm not done yet!!"

Mitotsudaira did not hold back.

The lack of pain allowed those without it to immediately resume fighting, so she needed to continue attacking and leave her opponent physically unable to move. In other words...

...I need to destroy her body!!

If she smashed the woman's entire skeleton, tore all of her muscles, and destroyed her senses, the lack of pain would mean nothing. So...

"Hoo!"

Mitotsudaira grabbed the stocker to her right and tore it from the floor, but she was not trying to hit her opponent with the stocker. She wanted the weapons. She threw the stocker into the air, it hit the ceiling, and its hammers scattered downward. Mitotsudaira reached up toward them and grabbed a convenient one.

"One!"

She tugged it down with all her strength and slammed it into the enemy who had come to a stop after breaking through the left row of weapons. The sound of impact harmonized with the broken stockers and weapons caught in the attack.

"Two!!"

Mitotsudaira rotated around and grabbed a handle from the air. The weapons hit the floor and bounced toward her, but she used her knees to scatter them away like ocean spray.

"Three!!!"

After four, five, six, and seven, she stopped counting.

But the solid sounds, flying fragments, and crashing weapons did not stop.

After a total of around fifteen, she grabbed the stocker with both hands as it was the only thing still falling from the ceiling.

"How about this!?"

She shouted while swinging the stocker and a breath left her lungs amid the fading reverberation of the metallic blow.

She breathed in again, arose from the lowered stance of swinging down the stocker, and straightened her back.

"You should look over here."

A voice reached her from the right side of the stage.

Mitotsudaira turned toward the female voice.

This was not the same woman as before, but she still recognized the voice.

...That's the woman who was speaking with the chancellor at the bottom of the tower!

Just as she wondered if there had been two hidden fighters, the woman jumped from the stage with a smile and jabbed her hand forward at high speed.

She moved quickly, but Mitotsudaira could follow the movements and therefore could react rationally.

The previous series of attacks had left something scattered in the air: the weapons that had been in the broken stockers.

One of them was a longsword. The blade seemed to float as it slowly rotated and the tip was facing Mitotsudaira.

But she did not care.

She swung a hand and grabbed the tip of the blade between her pointer and middle fingers. Then she only had to flick her wrist to send the sword toward the woman's hand.

The blade seemed to drop down.

The woman's hand was held flat and the blade reached it between the fingers.

There was a dull sound like wood being struck.

In an instant, the sword blade tore through from fingertips to wrist. The weighty blade split her arm down to the elbow and stopped when it hit the bone of her upper arm.

As soon as Mitotsudaira heard the chilling sound of blade on bone, she released the sword from her fingers.

...She cannot complete her jab!

The woman's arm had apparently been twisting as she thrust it toward Mitotsudaira.

“— — —”

Her split fingertips twisted her thumb downward and her little finger upward and the entire arm was split in a spiral.

And once the woman took a breath, the relaxing of the blood vessels sprayed blood outwards. Bloody steam rose before Mitotsudaira's eyes, but...

“Eh?”

The woman was still moving toward her.

The sword fell from the spilt arm she should not have been able to use anymore.

However, Mitotsudaira saw something else.

“The wound...”

The split in her arm was rapidly reconnecting. Almost like clothes being fastened, the wound filled in as the woman raised the arm a bit.

Mitotsudaira saw the arm undulate as it quickly pasted together from elbow to wrist. And by the time the woman reversed her wrist...

...High speed regeneration!?

“That wasn't enough.”

Mitotsudaira felt a chill as the woman's jabbing hand reached her chest.

The slender fingers arrived at her scarf.

...Kh!

She tried to lean back and out of the way, but the enemy's hand grabbed the scarf.

Mitotsudaira tried to sweep both hands up to hit the enemy's arm from below. She assumed a full-power blow from below the elbow would break the arm.

And as soon as she fired her arms upwards, she saw something.

“!?”

It was something that should not have been and seeing it stopped her for just a second.

And that second was enough time for the woman to throw her through the air with that one arm.

A few sets of eyes looked up at the heavy sounds coming from the distant sky.

“Sounds like it’s started. I hope Nate’s okay.”

“My daughter can be careless.”

A woman smiled while standing next to a wall and in front of a crossdresser and a wife.

“But it is extremely unusual for Master Rudolf to have started so soon.”

“Testament,” agreed the well-built woman standing at the tower’s entrance. “I wonder how much...no, I hope she is powerful enough to satisfy Master Rudolf. He is a complete Wahnsinniger and deviant, after all.”

“Hold on there. Is Rudolf really that amazing?”

“Yes.” The smiling woman nodded. “Because he is a deviant. ...Yes, that is everything there is to know about him.”

“Yeah, but... Nate’s pretty strong. She might tear your chancellor to pieces.”

“Oh, dear,” said the Reine des Garous in both surprise and joy, but the smiling woman did not seem to care.

“Tear him to pieces? That wouldn’t be possible. As we said, Master Rudolf is a deviant and a Wahnsinniger.”

After being thrown onto the stage, Mitotsudaira just barely managed to stick her landing. Her skirt spread out around her and she landed while down on one knee. She raised both heels to make sure she could begin moving immediately and she noticed someone standing on the eastern post.

It was Rudolf II and the crossdressing man looked down on her with arms crossed and chest thrust forward.

“Wellllcome to my precious, precious sacred ring!!”

The word “ring” led Mitotsudaira to check her surroundings.

...He’s right!

This was no stage. Now that she was on it, she could tell it was a combat ring with chains stretching between the four corner posts shaped like angels.

But her eyes quickly moved to one point in particular: Rudolf II’s right shoulder as he stood on the eastern post.

His girl’s uniform had a hole in the right shoulder and in the right side.

“Those holes...”

Mitotsudaira bared her teeth, raised her eyebrows, and shouted.

“Those are the holes from the spear I used earlier, aren’t they!?”

“Hmmm? So what if they are?”

Mitotsudaira realized then what this man was.

“A deviant...”

That referred to someone who deviated from the norm, but he was not just a bizarre person. His very existence deviated from the norm.

...An English monster fits the bill better than any from Hexagone Française...or even from the European mainland as a whole.

So she named that monster as she stood up, raised her right hand, and pointed at him.

“A Shapeshifter. That is what you are!”

“Really, you could call my brother the completed version,” said Matthias as he watched the merrymakers on the beach from atop the ship floating in the night sky. “The motto of the House of Habsburg is, ‘Let others wage war. You, lucky Austria, shall marry!’ So that its women could bear the many children that requires, the Austrian Habsburgs made physical alterations to their family members to lengthen their lifespans. Did you know that, Maeda?”

“I had heard of it.”

Toshiie was also looking down below where a group was waving up at them, placing their hands around each other's shoulders, and singing the academy songs of P.A.M. and M.H.R.R.

"They created bodies that could crossbreed with any other race and could survive giving birth to the children. What they ultimately created was a lack of pain, high-speed regeneration, and..."

"The ability to transform into anyone you want. ...And ironically, the only one who can do it all was not one of the Habsburg women but my brother, one of their children."

Matthias pulled a knife from his pocket and suddenly...

"Stop!" cried Matsu.

"Don't worry."

He stuck the knife in his own right wrist and tore a vertical gash. There was a dull tearing sound, but...

"See? There isn't any bloo-oh, there's a little bit. And there's a fair bit of pain, too. ...That's because I was a failure."

"I wouldn't call that a failure. From my point of view, you're still plenty human."

"Thank you, Maeda, but I am not as perfect as my brother. Not in body or in soul. After all..."

A cheer rose from below because a one-armed demon had stepped out of a medical ship. He raised his single remaining arm and the crowd raised their arms as well.

"That must be nice. No, I mustn't call it 'nice'. But they and you can feel pain, so you can imagine what other people must be feeling. But I have a lot of trouble there. That's why it's such a relief to be your puppet. That way, I know the pain and everything else I bring to others is moving the world. And...well...that movement tells me I am a normal part of the world."

"Then Chancellor Rudolf is...?"

"He is too kind. He can't feel pain, but he still imagines it. When we were

children, our parents would hit me when I made a mistake, but they never even did that to the success that was my brother. So...”

So...

“My brother started to think that he might not be human. That is why he tried to learn of the gods, tried to draw closer to them, and learned Technomagic and similar techniques to strengthen himself further. Do you understand why he wanted to ‘move’ to the Magdeburg region? As a Protestant principality, it interacts with England, so he can study English Technomagic and non-humans there. In other words, he could study the true Shapeshifters and sub-gods.”

With that said, Matthias stood up.

“Now, how about we get going? Everyone down below is waving, so it’s time we left for the next battlefield.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am. This is my destiny. Or that’s how I view it anyway.”

He put the knife back in his pocket and he did so by stabbing it deep into his chest below his coat.

“My brother taught me this method when we were children. I of course ended up covered in blood, but no matter how much they scolded him, they never struck him. Striking him wouldn’t have done any good, you see.”

But...

“That is why he does not know if he is a child of man or not.”

“Do you understand!?”

Rudolf’s voice reverberated across the metal room as he stood on the corner post.

Standing in the center of the ring, Mitotsudaira saw him spread his lowered arms.

“I! I have never once felt pain! No matter how much I carve myself, crush myself, melt myself, or burn myself, I return to normal right away!!”

He pulled a sword from his back while once more asking if she understood.

He had not been carrying the weapon on his back. It had been stored there by piercing his flesh.

And with a quick movement, he lopped off his own right hand. After a refreshing sound much like a fruit being cut, the severed hand fell to the floor.

“See?”

But as it fell, it dissolved. Starting with the fingertips, it transformed into what looked like bloody steam and, by the time he swung his right hand again, the supposedly severed hand had grown back. It was still surrounded by a bit of bloody steam, so...

...That is divine protection using dissolving and regeneration spells.

She knew this had to be the regeneration spell passed down by the Austrian Habsburgs as they continued to research it.

By continually casting the spell on themselves, they essentially embedded it in their bodies and it would take hold of the child that took form within them. By repeating that process for generations, they had produced what could be called a spell life form.

“This is also...quite amazing.”

Rudolf moved the blade again to stab it horizontally through his neck from left to right.

There was a deep sound as it pierced his spine and severed his arteries, but...

“Do you understand?”

She did, but she could not put it in words. After all...

...He cut off his respiratory system and severed his circulatory system, but he's still speaking!?

“You see... I do have a human form and my body regenerates like you've seen, but you know what? My respiration and circulation is really just for show. I seem to only need my active nervous system and my muscles to move, but they don't work like other people's do.”

So, you see?

“What am I if I can’t die? My parents wouldn’t punish me, so I began to think I might be special. Yes, in other words, I began to think I might be a god. And so I trained my body. Y’know, like a sculpture. You’ve seen the Renaissance sculptures, haven’t you? I trained myself to look just like those.”

Rudolf II laughed and lifted up his skirt.

“But when I looked into it, apparently the ancient gods were hermaphrodites. That’s when it hit me. I had trained my male side to the point of a divine sculpture, so it was time for the female side.”

As he spoke, he changed form. First, the well-built woman from the tower’s entrance appeared. Next, the one who had stood near the wall. And after that...

...The women on the stairs and in the corridors!

That was not all. He raised his speed and switched from woman to woman at a dizzying pace.

“These are all such wonderful people, you know? After all, they tried to give me pain. They climb onto this ring, you see. And they use weapons or chemicals to carve me up, crush me, or split me open. And yet... And yet...”

“And yet?”

“Yes.” Rudolf II’s shoulders drooped. “They all fell to their knees without ever making me feel pain.”

“You all look pretty strong, but you’re saying you couldn’t do it?”

The well-built woman nodded at Toori’s question. She pulled a spear out from behind the entrance. It had the logo of the Holy Knights’ Steel Association, the brand that represented the Catholic principalities.

“To be honest, I’m from a Catholic principality and I was hired to assassinate Master Rudolf.”

She wrapped her arms around the spear and shook her head.

“But no technique I’m aware of could do it. I couldn’t even make him feel

pain.”

“Yes. I was actually asked to poison him...but it didn’t work. The divine protection of his regeneration and defenses is just too powerful, so he sweated it all out.” The smiling woman lowered the ends of her eyebrows. “All one hundred and two people living in the tower came here to take his life and we fight him every day or even every hour.”

“Is he kind to you?”

“Testament. He is the emperor protected by Catholicism and his attempts to make himself divine have very nearly made him a hermaphrodite. ...He has surpassed the boundary between man and woman. True to history, he has no interest in women. Or sex at all, for that matter.”

“Sounds like the opposite of Nate Maman.”

“Oh, honestly. I-I only do it with my husband, you know?”

“So you don’t deny it?” muttered Naito as the Reine des Garous put her hands on her cheeks and wiggled back and forth.

However, the werewolf queen then looked to the two Catholic women.

“Do you two idolize Chancellor Rudolf?”

“Testament. Our power is no match for him and yet he does not exterminate us.”

“He makes sure it’s a proper battle, though. We can use our full strength, but we’re still no match for him.”

The smiling woman lowered the ends of her eyebrows again.

“Yes, we are no match for him. ...He is kind enough to accept us even though we can’t rid him of his loneliness.”

She looked up at the tower.

“So we offer all of our techniques up to him and train with him. He is truly wonderful. ...He uses our techniques and our bodies, but he goes far beyond that.”

So...

“What do you think? Will your envoy be able to make Master Rudolf feel pain?”

“I am talking about pain!”

Mitotsudaira saw Rudolf II jump from the corner post.

He jumped high. He almost reached the ceiling despite starting at a standstill. She saw him fly high with his limbs spread out, so she hurriedly escaped to the chains.

He then crashed into the metal ring.

He sent his entire body into the metal surface at once.

...Don't tell me...

“How much of a god am I!? Even as I use all my strength to prostrate myself before the guardian angels of the cardinal directions! I feel no pain!!”

He used brute strength to jump back up. Mitotsudaira noticed a drawing of god on the metal surface of the ring and several faint human-shaped dents covered it.

That was proof that he had prostrated himself like that countless times before.

“Watch closely!”

He jumped from the eastern angel post once more.

He collided with the floor, but he immediately ran to the western angel post and performed a somersault from the top.

“———!!”

He collided with the floor again and ran to the south after getting up. He continued the process and jumped from the northern angel post.

More sounds of impact followed and Mitotsudaira belatedly realized that the floor surrounding the ring was carved with a diagram of heaven.

This sacred ring was made to sacrifice oneself to god, the angels, and heaven.

He jumped again and again, moved around and around, sped up, and

continually slammed his entire body onto the heavenly ring.

But no matter how many times he tried it, he could not reach the bottom of the ring.

“Whyyyyyy not!?”

He got up on his knees, swung his arms outwards, and looked up toward heaven.

“Because! Because! Because I am a failure that cannot understand people’s pain! At first, I thought god had abandoned me, so I decided to rely on Technomagic! I gathered M.H.R.R.’s spells and considered going to England where many Technohexen live! I studied the English language and even thought about becoming an evil, filthy Technohexen! Because...”

Because...

“This is a dangerous time for M.H.R.R.! So! So wouldn’t my human and intelligent brother be far, far better suited as emperor!? So! So I thought if I disappeared...”

Mitotsudaira knew what he was going to say.

“You mean... You were forced to be emperor?”

“Yes?” Rudolf II nodded. “And there was not even an election just for show. I was only chosen because I belonged to the appropriate family for the history recreation and because I was the older of the two brothers.”

He laughed.

“Isn’t that weird? Why is that the one time they followed the rules without using interpretations!?”

She did understand why they would do that. With the Thirty Years’ War approaching, M.H.R.R. would have quickly started strictly following the history recreation to prevent other nations from interfering. That was why they had chosen their emperor based on family instead of ability, talent, or willingness.

They had likely used the historical fact that the prince-electors system had mostly been for show at that point.

“Whyyy!?”

Rudolf did not feel he was suited for the imperial throne.

“Shouldn’t they have made my brother emperorr!?! And if they couldn’t do that, they should have done something like the Far East’s student council instead of putting someone as dumb as me in charge!”

She understood. While the Testament Union interfered some too, the Far East chose its student council members in a student council election. Rudolf must have wanted to eliminate himself from the list of candidates and then had the emperor chosen in an election.

“Whyyy!? Why was there no electioooooon!?”

There was nothing she could say. The man before her questioned his own existence even as no one understood him, the historical age made use of him, and he had his freedom robbed from him.

But after taking a breath, he stood up.

And he gave a quiet laugh: heh heh.

“But you see,” he continued. “It doesn’t really matter now. I will be free soon. ...Because you know what? I will die here.”

What? wondered Mitotsudaira. *How can someone like this die?*

As she questioned herself, the answer came to her.

“Are you going to use something to make yourself officially ‘dead’!?”

The tower was near Magdeburg, so if it was anything...

...Is it the Sack of Magdeburg?

No, she decided. They were near Magdeburg, but this place was still a good bit southwest from the city. M.H.R.R.’s siege troops would not reach it.

But, she thought. *There is a way to bring a battle here.*

It can’t be, she thought, but once she thought of a certain individual, she was certain she was right.

...Mother!

“Is it Hexagone Française!?” she asked with her eyebrows raised.

Why had her mother been placed as their guide?

And why had her mother not returned home once they had arrived?

...Is this why!?

“Hexagone Française plans to cross the national borders to attack during the Sack of Magdeburg, don’t they!? And the Reine des Garous intends to meet up with them!”

“Do you understand what that means?”

“Judge.” She nodded. “Hexagone Française and M.H.R.R. have only been staring each other down so far, but the two academies finally intend to begin the Thirty Years’ War in earnest!”

Which meant...

“Those two great academies are beginning to move toward the Peace of Westphalia, aren’t they!?”

“That’s right. I managed to inform my brother and the others of the Sack’s hastened schedule, so they should be quickly finishing their preparations to invade. And your chancellor, who is traveling with the Reine des Garous, will arrive here thanks to the attack by my brother’s warriors.”

Anne of Austria spoke from the shoulder of a silver god of war seated in front of a torch-lit cathedral.

Masazumi sat on the bench to the right and she accepted a bamboo cup of hot amazake that Asama passed her.

“So Hexagone Française will be temporarily invading M.H.R.R.? That’s definitely a bold way of showing their cooperation with the Protestants while also holding M.H.R.R. in check.”

“Hexagone Française wishes to crush the M.H.R.R. Catholics’ siege troops and interpretively establish that battle as the Sack of Magdeburg.”

“But,” said Masazumi as she looked to Guericke on the opposite bench.

The man nodded with his arms crossed and then looked up at Anne.

“Why didn’t they begin this invasion earlier? If Hexagone Française intends to save Magdeburg, you could have started before now.”

“K.P.A. Italia’s defeat and the Musashi’s movements left us with no other choice. Originally, Hexagone Française planned to help evacuate Magdeburg as volunteer soldiers. The Hexagone Française force deployed to IZUMO yesterday had been prepared for that purpose. But since Musashi came here, partially due to Matsunaga’s guidance, they instead watched to see what Musashi would do. If they botched their interference, the Testament Union would start complaining again,” explained Anne. “But now that K.P.A. Italia has fallen, the Testament Union and Europe is in urgent need of a guiding nation.”

...And what is needed for that?

Masazumi spoke her thought aloud.

“Proof that you can oppose P.A. Oda?”

“Testament. Interfering in the Sack of Magdeburg will do just that. Now that the schedule has been moved up and the Musashi will not arrive in time, Hexagone Française can rush in and be seen as the savior and hero. So Mayor Guericke, I assume you will still be developing your hemispheres with Musashi, but Hexagone Française would like to help too. And as the Musashi will be late, Hexagone Française’s fleet would be a better place to protect the hemispheres during the coming battle.”

...How can you say that when you’ll be the ones starting the battle?

Masazumi left that unsaid because it would not solve anything other than an ethical issue. Now was the time for action and they could discuss that and its result afterwards.

Anne then pushed Guericke further.

“If it goes well, please support the interpretation we want, Mayor Guericke.”

The man finally nodded.

“Testament. I have no reason to reject that.”

“Thank you.”

Anne smiled, and then...

“———”

Masazumi thought the girl went limp for a moment, but had she imagined it?

However, Guericke, Asama, and even Mazarin who was climbing up next to Anne all stopped moving.

But...

“Sorry about that. It’s been so long since I have been outside that I have a lot on my mind.”

Anne got up, breathed out a virtual breath, and shrugged. She was telling them not to worry about it, so Masazumi finally nodded in understanding.

“Judge. This is welcome news for Musashi as well.”

But...

“When will Hexagone Française arrive? After the change of schedule, the Sack of Magdeburg begins in an hour at eight, so they would really have to hurry if they want to intervene.”

“Yes,” said the Palais-Cardinal with Anne’s voice. “They will likely arrive in half an hour which is half an hour before the Sack begins. ...They should already be cruising in stealth mode over the cooperative Protestant principalities. They are quite close by...both in time and space.”

“Hexagone Française will arrive west of Magdeburg at 19:30...only half an hour from now!?”

Tenzou questioned and protested the time the Reine des Garous had just given.

“Musashi won’t return until early tomorrow morning! This is far sooner!”

But the Reine des Garous only smiled.

“Well, there is only an hour until the Sack of Magdeburg now and Hexagone Française has a lot to gain in this battle, so the Hexagone Française fleet would have left as soon as word came in earlier.”

“You seem awfully calm about this,” muttered Tenzou right before he figured it out. He knew why Hexagone Française had acted so soon. “It will take time to deploy troops in the formations needed to combat the troops laying siege to Magdeburg, won’t it? So when Hexagone Française arrives half an hour before the Sack, they will unload their warriors, probably spend about fifteen minutes deploying them, and then begin their attack. Am I right?”

“Testament. M.H.R.R.’s warriors laying siege to Magdeburg are not incompetent. They are thirty thousand in all and five thousand will rush the city. Of those, one thousand are using high-speed mobile shells designed to conquer cities. They will be able to shut down all of Magdeburg’s functions in fifteen minutes, so we have to act first and intervene. ...Still, I’m impressed you figured that out.”

The Reine des Garous placed a hand on her cheek and gave him a smile.

It embarrassed him how Mary smiled back as if she were being praised herself, but he was tearfully grateful for the sensation of her arm around him.

“Anyway,” he said while taking a breath and writing up the general series of events on a sign frame.

- **Thirty minutes later – 19:30 – Hexagone Française – Arrives at Magdeburg.**
- **Forty five minutes later? – 19:45 – Hexagone Française – Deploys their troops and attacks the warriors laying siege to Magdeburg.**
- **One hour later – 20:00 – M.H.R.R. Catholics – Planned begin of the Sack.**
- **One hour fifteen minutes later – 20:15 – M.H.R.R. Catholics – Planned end of the Sack.**

“So does that sum it up?”

He decided the thirty thousand M.H.R.R. Catholic warriors laying siege to Magdeburg did not have an easy task.

...One careless move and they’ll be caught between the city and Hexagone Française.

But if they retreated and allowed Hexagone Française into Magdeburg, they would have a hard time conquering the city even if reinforcements from K.P.A. Italia arrived.

Would they carry out the Sack while prepared to fight on two fronts or would they wait for reinforcements while prepared for a nearly impossible fight afterwards?

Either way, they could not avoid a desperate fight.

...I suppose that it is just how well thought out Hexagone Française's strategy is.

It was true the situation had been set in motion sooner than Hexagone Française had anticipated, but they were using that and the urgent situation it created to their advantage.

"What do you think? It seems like a fairly safe plan for Musashi as well. Of course, the M.H.R.R. Catholics might target the Musashi to deal with their stress."

She wrapped her arms around her own body.

"But even if something goes wrong, I'm here. I can protect all of you and protect Hexagone Française."

That's probably true, thought Tenzou, but after a while...

...This is all I can say.

"It may not be my place, but...I must refuse."

Tenzou put up his guard a little and spoke his rejection toward the Reine des Garous's smile.

Past her, the crossdresser tilted his head while receiving some coffee brewed by the women protecting the tower.

"Huh? Tenzou, shouldn't we let Nate Maman protect us? It'd be easier. She's got huge breasts."

"I will ignore that last part, Toori-dono, but that would leave us owing a debt

to Hexagone Française. We should avoid making any political decisions until we can run them by Masazumi-dono. I know it is rude to speak of unlikely possibilities here...but Hexagone Française might do more than just ‘protect’ us.”

Mary stepped up next to him with the two Excaliburs floating on either side of her, and spoke clearly to the Reine des Garous.

“Would you protect us even with me here?”

“It would be interesting to have England indebted to us.”

...She is clearly powerful.

She did not hesitate to reach for the greatest possible reward. Some would call it greed, but it was the same as a predator showing no concern for its prey.

She was not the same as the rest of them.

Calling it greed just showed how soft they were.

...When resisting, strength is the only option.

He hoped Mitotsudaira would return soon, but...

“Wait, wait. Tenzou, Maman. Quit talking without me.”

“But, chancellor,” said Naito. “Were you even listening to what Tenzou said? It looked to me like you started staring at Maman’s breasts from the side, measuring their volume, and paying an inordinate amount of attention to what you could see up that spear lady’s skirt.”

The crossdresser glanced back and saw the spear woman frantically fixing the bottom of her skirt.

“Oh, damn. ...Gold Mar, don’t say that kind of thing! You’re ruining my hidden fun!”

“So did you or did you not hear what that ninja boy said?”

“What?” The crossdresser wrinkled his brow. “I-I-I did! Of-of course I did?”

“Toori-dono, I would like it if you didn’t look down at the ground when you said that.”

As Tenzou complained, Mary tugged on his sleeve.

“How would you sum up what you said before, Master Tenzou?”

“Judge. If we decide anything for ourselves, Masazumi-domo will be super mad.”

“Wow. Now *that* is easy to understand.” The idiot scratched his head. “Well, you heard him, Nate Maman. We can’t rely on you until we ask Seijun. Sorry.”

“There is no need to apologize. This just means I have to forcibly drag you along. It will probably be a lot of work for you if you try to resist, though.” The Reine des Garous smiled at them. “Hey? If you won’t accept our protection, then think about where you want to take your king. I will give you a certain level of help as an individual.”

“That we will gladly accept. But...” Tenzou looked up at the tower. “If Chancellor Rudolf will use Hexagone Française’s attack to mean his ‘death’, then this is our only opportunity to acquire Chancellor Carlos I’s memo.”

That was likely why Hexagone Française had sent them here.

“Now, then,” said the Reine des Garous. “I will not help with that. After all, I must not crush her pride any more than I already have.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure.”

That comment came from the crossdresser looking up at the tower with crossed arms.

He smiled a little and said more.

“Nate holds onto her pride more than you think, Maman.”

“Nowww, what to do?”

Mitotsudaira listened to Rudolf II from the center of the ring.

He leaned against the eastern corner post and threw a sword her way.

Mitotsudaira caught the flying blade as if slapping it with her right hand.

“You want me to make you feel pain with us?”

“I feel like having some fun before I am freed. Okay?”

He put the memo in his pocket and literally stored it in his chest.

“The Sack of Magdeburg begins in one hour and the report I saw says Hexagone Française will arrive in half an hour after rushing over here.”

But...

“Until then, I am the godlike Holy Roman Emperor of M.H.R.R. And its chancellor. So I will give you a chance until then. A chance to take *this* from me.”

He was telling her to fight him. He hated his position as M.H.R.R.’s emperor-chancellor, but he would fight her as his final job and to show he would not cooperate with the enemy.

How noble of him, she thought. But...

“What if I can’t make you feel pain and take it from you?”

“I will leave this tower before Hexagone Française’s attack. I suppose I will head to England. But...”

He lightly struck his chest.

“I will take this memo with me. After all, it should be enough insurance in case something happens.”

“That would be the worst case scenario.”

In England, M.H.R.R.’s Maeda Toshiie had indicated just how important the Princess Disappearances were, but that scenario would mean they had been too weak to obtain a necessary clue and had that clue taken away.

If that happened, Musashi’s reputation would hit rock bottom. She had to avoid that.

And she felt all of the decisions rested on her shoulders.

...It comes down to pain.

As soon as she started to think about how to make him feel pain, she felt a gust of wind to her left.

The smiling woman was there.

“It has already begun, you know?”

A flat handed jab flew toward her.

Chapter 69: Resigners in the Metal Tower

CHAPTER 69

"Resigners in the Metal Tower"



Oh, my
Are you all right?
Point Allocation (Carefree)

Oh, my

Are you all right?

Point Allocation (Carefree)

The battle in the ring began with an exchange of strikes and evasions.

First, they both pursued the other who was trying to move around to their side.

They pursued each other like a ballroom dance, but they also rotated their bodies with quick hooks and backhands or tried to land a lethal blow by jabbing a hand at them.

But neither of them forgot to have a backup plan if their attack was avoided. As they spun about like blooming flowers, combination attacks were added in after the fact.

They did not stop.

They would throw a kick to tear into their enemy's advance or launch a quick kick from below when that enemy was focused on their upper body.

Their footwork was primarily composed of stepping forward and immediately evading. They would charge in with all their strength before twisting their body and leaping away.

They would spin, step in to attack, evade, and spin some more to move back in.

They would dizzyingly swap positions and Rudolf II would sometimes put some distance between them.

"Hmmm."

He would swing his body into the chains and use the reactionary force to charge quickly forward.

Mitotsudaira responded by determining the point he would begin his lariat or knee-blow and hit him with her heel or a slash of a sword. But with his instant regeneration and lack of pain, no amount of crushing or cutting would stop him.

The wind whipped up, sounds of impact rang out, and blood sprayed.

High-density actions produced countless noises in the center of the large steel room's illuminated ring.

And instead of stopping, those actions and noises picked up speed.

“———!”

A voice escaped both of them. It was a groan that sounded both delighted and furious.

“...!”

The sounds of impact grew even stronger.

...What a troublesome opponent!!

Mitotsudaira thought while deflecting her opponent's attacks with the sword in her right hand.

This enemy used more than just physical blows. He would sometimes spread his fingers and grab at her joints by entangling his fingers around the back of her knee or her wrist. She had nearly been thrown several times and she had actually been lifted from the ground a few times. Each time, she had kicked off the floor to accelerate the throw herself and escape.

I'm at the disadvantage here, she thought.

Don't be so fainthearted, she scolded herself, but facts were facts.

For one thing, their rate of recovery from injury was completely different. A broken arm would be a major disadvantage for her, but he would recover instantly.

Currently, he was rushing toward her.

“...!”

She brought her heel down on his knee, destroying it, but that crushed knee regenerated after only a moment.

In fact, his knee pushed up on her heel and sent her flying into the air.

She spun around in midair to regain control, but...

“You really are troublesome!”

“I love that you aren’t calling me a ‘monster’.”

With those words, Rudolf II sped up and she saw someone circle around to her left.

...A woman!?

She had never seen this woman before. Her brown hair fluttered behind her, but...

“He’s faster than when he was a man!”

She knew why. In his male body, Rudolf II had the ideal athletic form, but the male body was large and entirely covered in muscles.

When those muscles were perfectly balanced, they included muscles that provided acceleration and muscles that provided endurance.

The all-purpose male physique was quite inefficient for high-speed movement.

Its initial speed was slow and its maneuverability was poor.

On the other hand, the female physique was skinnier and shorter, giving it maneuverability and flexibility.

In a limited space like this, the female form could fight at greater speeds than the male form. And...

...His muscle density must not be what it seems!

This was still Rudolf II’s body. When he became a smaller woman, his body would grow denser.

He was a maneuverable woman with the explosive strength of a man contained within.

As a man, he could make large movements. As a woman, he could make precise movements with instantaneous power behind them.

He was switching between the two forms more and more quickly as the battle progressed.

“Kh...”

As the woman rushed in to her left, Mitotsudaira threw a left backhand and she kept her fingers together for a finger jab bent like a duck's neck.

However, the woman accelerated even further. She transformed into an even shorter woman and leaped behind Mitotsudaira.

“...!”

Acting on reflex, Mitotsudaira jumped forward.

And she heard something like clapping hands directly behind her where her head had been.

The movement of the shadow on the floor told her Rudolf II had tried to grab her in his male form. He had brought his hands together to grab at her head.

To hold him back, she swept back the sword in her left hand and she turned around. As she did, Rudolf II swung his hands straight down, leaned his upper body forward, and...

“Here I goooo!”

He accelerated in his male form, but a moment later, he became the spear woman, the smiling woman, an unfamiliar woman, and consecutively smaller women while continuing to lean forward.

...That's...!

It was her. It was her silver hair and gold eyes. The only differences were the holes in the right shoulder and right side of the M.H.R.R. uniform.

“I have more or less figured...nn, you out!”

With those words, her other self rushed toward her.

Rudolf jabbed a hand forward as he ran.

...What a wonderful body!

This Demi Loup-Garou girl had been born between a non-human and a human. And from what he had heard, she was the Reine des Garous's daughter.

Her body was made to hunt her opponent. She would have no problem moving

just like a human and her wrist joints and other points on her skeleton were well-balanced for attack.

His initial jab was enough to tell him that. A normal human needed to explicitly move to thrust their hand forward, but with this body, he simply had to attack and leave the details up to the body.

He did not need to twist the muscles beyond their limits and he did not need to focus on turning the joints. As long as he decided he wanted to thrust his nails into his opponent and then swung his hand, the rest happened automatically.

This was a beast's body.

He had not yet perfectly read the positions of her joints and muscles, but if he could move like this already, just how much could he do once he read it all perfectly?

"Magnificent!"

He then quickly moved within range of his opponent.

"!?"

Mitotsudaira's mind was taken over by surprise and confusion.

...That was fast!?

She understood that her opponent had copied her body.

...But why is he faster than me!?

The way he was carried by his initial speed was completely different. She did think he had built up acceleration by starting in his male form and transforming into smaller and smaller bodies, but his speed had not dropped even after remaining in her body.

In fact, his speed had increased.

Mitotsudaira was confused.

"..."

As he attacked, she made a broad counterattack by swinging her sword

diagonally upwards.

Her own face ducked below the blade. It was an instantaneous duck, there was a smile on the face looking up at her, and that smiling face continued up toward her chest.

He's so fast, she thought. *But how?* she also thought.

His initial speed was completely different. The rest may have been the same, but there was an overwhelming difference in that initial speed.

"Just to be clear, I'm keeping my muscle layout as close to yours as possible."

Meaning...

"The two of us are the same right now. Except...as far as the quality of the muscles is concerned, mine are a strengthened human version while yours are naturally half Loup-Garou. Yes, so yours should be superior."

Mitotsudaira was confused by that comment in her own voice.

...Then why is he faster than me!?

She received an answer in another statement.

"In other words, I know better how to use this body. I have copied so many different people and studied the formation of their bodies, so...yes. I use their body better than they can and surpass them. ...That is what I do. So..."

As her own face approached, it seemed to ripple and distort. It showed its teeth in what could be seen as a smile or protest.

"What am I!?"

Then the attack arrived.

She is slow, thought Rudolf II while observing his enemy.

She had not mastered the use of her own body and she was simply relying on its basic abilities to fight.

While she could very well be strong that way, she became a heavy tank that lacked the advantages of a female body.

“That’s not how you do iiiit!”

Rudolf II jabbed his sharp fingernails forward again and again.

After throwing his right hand forward, he pulled it back, reversed his rotation, and threw in his left hand. He then swung his outstretched left hand to the outside, rotated his body to the left, and thrust his right hand up from below.

He kept stepping further and further forward as if making quick jabs with his feet and he would use each step as a launching point for his hands while making sure his opponent could not escape to the left or right.

She could only continue moving back with an occasional large leap away.

“...Hoo!”

So he spread his hand and tried to grab her instead. She shrank down during her jump, avoided having him grab her during that stiff moment, and immediately dropped back down.

She has excellent reflexes, he thought. And she seems to have a knowledge of joint locks and throws.

She had likely been trained by one of her fellow students. She was especially good at escaping in the instant when he grabbed her and tried to knock her from her feet.

That was why he could try to grab her as a simple feint to control her movement.

However, she continued to avoid his attacks and she would occasionally counterattack with solid blows. She seemed to have adopted a tactic centered on evasion and defense. She had already dropped her sword onto the ring and only attacked with her more maneuverable bare hands.

...But you have nowhere else to go!!

She had just about reached the western corner post and she would have no escape once he pursued her there.

They were three steps away, then only two, and finally...

...One step!

There was still the one step left, but Rudolf made his attack there. He forced his way forward.

A moment later, the enemy took action as if she had been waiting for this.

“You were luring me innn!?”

She did not answer, but she was staring directly at him.

She sent out the nails of her right hand as he stepped forward. It was a diagonal slash from below, making it a difficult attack to see.

Rudolf II forcibly twisted his body.

As Musashi’s 5th Special Duty Officer’s attack raced diagonally from the lower left to the upper right, he tilted his body back and to the right.

He tried to lean away from the attack and he had perfectly judged its range.

“———!!”

So he managed to dodge it. Her nails tore a deep gash in his left cheek, but the wound would heal in half a second. He doubted it would pain her heart to have hurt him either.

And now that he had dodged, it was his turn to attack.

He used his leaning body to move his right foot outwards and his left foot forwards. As he swung his body forwards, he launched his left hand straight forward to corner his opponent.

He targeted the center of her body: the chest.

In an instant, she pulled her right hand back from its failed attack to guard her neck and chest.

That was a wise decision. She was protecting the center of her body and her neck.

But Rudolf II did not mind.

...Your body has more than enough strength to tear itself apart!

He would break through her defenses and pierce his hand through her and out

her back.

It would destroy his arm, but that would regenerate soon enough.

Victory was his.

With that in mind, he simply launched his hand straight forward.

But then he saw his opponent vanish from before his eyes.

“...!?”

He knew why: her speed had increased.

...But how!?

His hand gouged into something.

It stabbed wrist-deep into the angel-shaped corner post he had cornered her against.

And then he sensed his enemy circling around behind him.

He had thought of her as slow until now, but she had suddenly sped up.

...How!?

Mitotsudaira's body felt light.

Rudolf II's back stood before her with his hand stuck in the corner post. It was identical to her own back.

The only difference was the uniform.

Rudolf II wore an M.H.R.R. girls' uniform, but...

...I removed mine!

Something floated in the air by the corner post past Rudolf II's back.

It was a uniform. She had removed the coat and skirt, including the hard point parts.

She had removed it just before her earlier evasion.

When thinking about her speed, she had reached a certain answer.

Fighting in an unfamiliar uniform was dangerous.

The M.H.R.R. girls' uniform had quite a few metal parts and excellent defenses, but her usual Far Eastern uniform and the Hexagone Française girls' uniform on which her personal combat dress was based allowed for more graceful movements.

That made a large difference.

So when she had made the diagonal swing of her arm, she had removed her waist's hard point parts and her skirt. When she had pretended to bring her hand to her neck and chest to guard, she had actually removed her neck's hard point parts and her coat.

She now only wore the inner suit and the tights. She could not lighten herself anymore without stripping down to her underwear or completely nude.

She removed as much of the unfamiliar clothing as she could and then attacked.

"...!"

She grabbed the sword she had dropped on the ring and went for...

...The neck!!

As her other self started to turn around, she made a rising horizontal slash.

It flew through above the shoulder and into the center of the neck.

The quick slash produced a sound much like chopping through a tree.

"How about that!?"

And her own head flew through the air.

...I did it!

It's a good thing he wasn't wearing my usual clothing, thought Mitotsudaira.

Anyone with a combat position was trained in slaughtering livestock and dissecting animals, so the sensation of the attack and its result were not enough to fill her with revulsion.

...But I have never done it to myself before.

So I'm glad for that slight difference, she thought as she watched her own head fly through the air.

At any rate, that ends this, she also thought.

Decapitating him would prevent his body from moving. The severed hand had turned to bloody smoke earlier, so the beheaded body would likely do the same and move to the head.

That meant her enemy had lost his body. And...

"This is my chance to take the memo!"

Leaving him unable to move and swiping the memo had been her plan for victory.

The memo had always been her only objective here, so as long as she got that, nothing else mattered. She did not even need to continue fighting. That was a very un-knight-like thing to think and she felt some shame, but...

...I honestly don't think I can win.

Their skill or their pure "strength" was too different. She was hardly one to talk with her non-human blood, but his transformation ability, lack of pain, and rapid regeneration was a veritable smorgasbord of unfair abilities even for a monster.

She needed to find victory somewhere outside of defeating him in battle.

And that was what she was doing. She stepped forward and took action to rob the airborne head of its freedom.

"...!"

She thrust her sword up into her other self's head to pin it in place.

But instead, a certain color exploded before her eyes.

It was the red of bloody smoke.

That was the spell smoke that appeared during Rudolf II's regeneration, but it had not come from where she was expecting.

...It was the headless body that was supposed to vanish.

But that proved wrong.

Instead, her own decapitated head vanished from the air in front of the sword.

“The head disintegrated!?”

“That’s right. The thing about my body is...the bigger part is always the main part.”

Silver hair suddenly spread out atop the headless body in front of her.

He was regenerating quickly and she saw gold eyes turn back toward her.

...Then!!

He had said he wanted to feel pain.

“Then...!”

As her own face turned toward her, she pierced her raised sword through its side.

With a cold and solid sound, the blade stabbed through the side of her own head and into the medulla oblongata.

“What about this!?”

Mitotsudaira felt the version of herself before her eyes looked like a corpse.

She had taken three steps away as soon as she made the stab, but she had let go of the sword.

And ahead of her, her other self had stopped moving. The sword was stabbed in up to the guard and most of the blade was sticking out the other side of her own face.

This tilted that head in the opposite direction, but...

“How very heavy.”

Her other self gave a casual comment and smiled a little.

“That was a good idea. ...It really was.”

Yes.

“Even if my head can regenerate, I still see with my eyes and hear with my ears. In that case, it is my head that tells my body what to do, so you might be able to stop me by attacking there. And if you’re going to do that, you should go for the center of the nervous system. You should make a quick attack on the brain and medulla oblongata that send instructions to my body.”

Her other self tapped on the guard of the sword sticking from Mitotsudaira’s side of his head.

“And if you leave the weapon there, the constant damage to my nerves would cause me pain. Was that your idea?”

He was right and she saw no other possible way.

However, Rudolf II pointed something out to her. He slowly stuck a few of his fingernails between the blade and his skin.

“Let’s see...”

He peeled both sides away as if spreading them to create a gap.

The blade and sliced portion of his head opened up and she could see inside.

...That’s insane!

But she could see inside all the same.

“Well? The cut is so clean, isn’t it?”

“———”

The sight just about made her want to vomit, but he was right. She could see the cut, but there was no blood or any other kind of fluid. It looked like it was lined with soft glass.

“It can’t be... Did your regeneration power block off the cut as soon as the blade stabbed into you?”

“If anything, it was my shapeshifting power that did it. I transform into the kind of creature that would survive being cut without removing the blade.”

Her other self laughed and returned the blade and gap to normal.

“It’s true I feel a brief twitch when something hits my brain or medulla oblongata, but it’s more like an itch and it never reaches the level of pain. If you

want to do it...”

“I need to continually use new blades?”

Her other self nodded at that impossible suggestion and that enemy used the downward motion of the nod to grab the sword’s hilt from below.

“There.”

With the sound of breaking bone, Rudolf II pulled the blade through the top of his head like removing a hairband. Mitotsudaira realized something when she saw it.

“You didn’t feel pain even with the blade moving through your head?”

“Not at that speed, no. It was blocked from the beginning. And you know what?” He threw the sword aside. “No one has ever succeeded in making me feel pain.”

He turned toward her in the time it took the sword to fall.

“Now, I think I’ve figured it out.”

“Figured out what?”

She knew the answer, but her pride as the “real” one forced her to ask. And the “fake” one was forced to answer.

“You. ...Yes, I’ve mostly read how you work.”

With those words, her other self rushed toward her.

And at a speed she had not seen before.

Mitotsudaira did not hesitate to fall back.

She was light and he was fully-equipped.

...Full speed away!

She moved back, but not by back-stepping. She turned her back and ran with all her might. She poured in all her strength starting with the first step and she was moving toward something three meters ahead and a little to the right.

...The western corner post!

She would jump over it and land beyond it. If he pursued, she could attack in the slight opening as he landed. If he sensed that danger and stopped, she could put some distance between them and prepare herself for what came next.

“...”

She gathered strength in her thighs and made the three meter dash.

And she saw herself run right in front of her.

“!?”

Mitotsudaira was truly surprised.

She had nimbly moved away and then run at full speed, yet her other self had still cut in front of her.

...How fast is he!?

She was briefly reminded of her mother. When they had fought at IZUMO, her mother had also demonstrated abnormal bursts of speed like this.

This brought back the thought that had been carved into her heart eight years before and had returned to the surface just the other day.

It was the thought that she could not stand up to her mother.

But that was not accurate.

“What’s wrong?” asked her other self.

Her mother was not the only one she could not stand up to.

It was one thing when she was no match for an ally, but this opponent was an enemy as well as a copy of herself.

...And I still can’t do anything!?

She felt something hit her left side. While circling in front of her, her other self had used that motion to perform a roundhouse kick.

The sound of impact reverberated through her entire body and she was torn from the floor and into the air.

The chains that caught her lightened body gave a heavy groan.

The corner posts supporting the chains were made of metal, but they still bent from the force.

The recoil sent the chains back forward and launched Mitotsudaira high above the ring.

The other silver wolf jumped up to meet her there.

Her enemy lowered down until he was skimming by just above the metal ring's mat and then he used his great strength to jump straight up. He used his entire body as a giant spring, but used it to produce speed rather than height.

"Here I goooo!"

The right of his spread legs hit Mitotsudaira back down.

As soon as her body bent downwards, the other silver wolf's left leg flew upwards and kicked her bent body toward the ceiling.

The midair double kick produced a tearing sound and moved their bodies apart in the air.

The kick from below sent Mitotsudaira upwards and the other silver wolf dropped down.

However...

"I'm not done yet!"

The fake silver wolf used the recoil of kicking Mitotsudaira to perform a flip.

Using the acceleration of his great strength, he stretched out his body for a roundhouse heel kick from above Mitotsudaira.

That made three midair kicks.

It sounded more like a stake being driven into her flesh than a simple blow to her flesh and she quickly shot diagonally downward. The fake silver wolf kicked off the ceiling and jumped in the opposite direction.

They rapidly flew diagonally down to the west and east where the ring's chains awaited.

They fell.

Mitotsudaira and the other silver wolf were simultaneously stopped by the chains. Mitotsudaira's entire body shook from the shock and she sprawled out limply, but the other silver wolf looked like he was lounging on a sofa.

"Next."

One of them was thrown into the air, the other jumped up into the air, and they crossed paths.

As they crossed, the fake silver wolf flipped onto his side and shrank down.

"...!"

And he hit Mitotsudaira with a repelling drop kick.

Mitotsudaira was sent right back to the chains.

She had already lost control of her body due to the repeated strikes, but the other silver wolf showed no mercy. He flipped around in midair, landed in the ring, and moved below Mitotsudaira as she was bounced back by the chains again.

"Now, time for the main eveeeeent!"

The fake silver wolf grabbed her ankle.

For an instant, some slight life returned to Mitotsudaira's face. After all...

"Heh hehn. I'm not going to do what your mother did."

As he spoke, the false enemy spun around. He stood on his right toes with Mitotsudaira's right ankle in his left hand.

"Half giant swing!"

The fake silver wolf spun in place, tore through the wind, and waved Mitotsudaira around like a flag.

And he accelerated.

By the third rotation they were producing a tremendous sound, by the fifth the wind was shaking the entire room, by the ninth the weapons were rattling in the stockers, and by the fifteenth...

“Max speeeeed!”

The fake silver wolf threw what he held. Instead of just letting go to make a side throw, he forcibly bent his entire body forwards for an overhand throw.

It resembled a one-armed shoulder throw, he bent far enough for his forehead to reach the floor, and he launched Mitotsudaira.

“That’s where you wanted to go, wasn’t it?”

She collided with the western corner post.

The post bent at its base and the chains burst off of it.

A wave of metallic sounds filled the room and chain links sprayed outward while reflecting the light.

After taking the blow to her back, Mitotsudaira saw something in her blurry vision.

“Now, then. When I make my body so small and skinny, it leaves something to be desired in attack power. Then how about I try this?”

She saw her other self spread his arms and change form in the center of the ring.

...That’s...

She recognized the silver hair, the height, the sharp gold eyes, and the huge breasts.

This was the Reine des Garous.

Seeing her mother’s form shook Mitotsudaira’s heart.

“———”

Her body was still shaking from the beating it had taken, so she could not move. She had a concussion and the swinging had thrown off her inner ear and her center of gravity.

She could not stand and she even slid down the tilted post until her butt

reached the floor. However, she kept her eyes open to view what stood before her.

Her fake mother demonstrated the same instantaneous acceleration as her real mother had.

“...!”

But this fake hit her chest with a drop kick using both feet.

She no longer felt any pain.

...It's no use.

She did her best to hold back the thought that she had lost. If she let herself think that, she knew she really would lose.

But her body could do nothing about the attack and simply became a medium for the force to travel through.

The western corner post broke from its base behind her.

“———”

And she was sent flying through the air.

The angel-shaped corner post flew through the air.

Below it, the girl known as the silver wolf was knocked outside the ring.

Her light body crashed into one of the stockers of metal weapons surrounding the ring.

“———!!”

It broke and it was not the only one. Like a spreading wave, several of the weapon stockers were destroyed and the grips attached to blades or blunt metal flew up into the air.

A moment later, a crashing sound came from the western wall of the round room. Mitotsudaira had reached the outer wall and she was buried in a pile of broken weapon stockers.

All that remained was the fake Reine des Garous standing in the ring.

The airborne weapons and fragments clattered loudly on the floor and other objects that had fallen ahead of them.

The overlapping sounds almost sounded like rain or applause.

“The sounds have stopped,” said the smiling woman at the wall’s entrance below the tower.

The spear woman at the tower’s entrance gave a deep nod.

“Master Rudolf excels at that combination attack. He rarely makes it to the end, though.”

“Didn’t he get to the end with you?”

“No.” The spear woman smiled bitterly. “He slammed me against the post and then stopped just before making the finishing blow. And he was using your form at the time. I had no idea what was happening to me.”

“I see,” said the smiling woman. “But it sounded like he made it to the end this time. And it seemed faster than usual. It must not have been my form. I’m too light.”

The Reine des Garous nodded and sighed.

“That girl must not have been able to keep up. She can be rather slow.” She placed a hand on her cheek and sighed even deeper. “She’s always been so smart and diligent. ...And that’s what slows her down. She overthinks everything.”

“Hm? Is Nate really that slow? I’m not sure I get it.”

“Well,” began Tenzou as he looked up at the tower.

He saw Mary worriedly holding his arm and gave her a reassuring nod.

And then...

“As far as speed is concerned, Mitotsudaira-dono is not all that fast.”

I’m being harsh, but it’s the truth, thought Tenzou.

“She lacks speed both in her attacks and her movement. I’ll set aside Futayo-dono and Muneshige-dono since their speed isn’t exactly measurable, but she is the slowest of our special duty officers outside of Naomasa-dono.”

“Are you one of the faster ones, Master Tenzou? And does this have to do with stamina?”

“Well, I am relatively quick and my stamina is pretty decent... Why are you recording this, Naito-dono!?”

He turned back to the crossdresser before continuing.

“Anyway, you can probably tell by watching Naito-dono or Naruze-dono, but reflexes are vital in battle. But on the vanguard where one uses their whole body, attack speed and movement speed are more important. Of course, someone who uses a god of war like Naomasa-dono is different. But as I said, Mitotsudaira-dono is only a little higher than Naomasa-dono in attack speed and movement speed. You can find it all in the measurements we have taken.”

“Then why is she able to fight on the vanguard?”

“Her constant attacks with the silver chains, her superhuman strength, and her endurance.”

It was because she lacked speed that she used four silver chains to protect herself and to continuously attack without stopping.

...But she doesn't have those chains now.

Against normal students, she could still manage with her superhuman strength and endurance. Depending on how she fought, she could even handle someone on the level of a special duty officer.

But at the vice chancellor level or higher, that was no longer the case. One only reached that level by having skill, speed, and strength. Some vice chancellors like England’s Dudley gained the position as a commander of the other warriors, but otherwise anyone at vice chancellor level or above was truly non-standard.

Tenzou felt Mitotsudaira was at a serious disadvantage here.

...But...

He mentally tilted his head. He had long known Mitotsudaira as a classmate, so

he had a solid understanding of her speed.

“Did you give Mitotsudaira-dono the silver chains because you had noticed her speed? Is that it, Reine des Garous?”

“Didn’t I tell you? That girl is too diligent. That’s why I thought the silver chains would suit her better than my silver cross.”

“What do you mean by diligent?”

That seemed odd to him. It was true that Mitotsudaira was diligent. In their class, she would take it too far, become overly conservative, and be teased by Kimi and the others.

...And a lot happened in the past, too.

“What happens because she is too diligent?”

“You don’t know? Overly diligent people tend to overthink things.”

He did not know what that meant, so he guessed it was something only Mitotsudaira and the Reine des Garous would understand.

But then he felt a tug on his arm and saw Mary tilting her head.

“Um, you keep saying Lady Mitotsudaira is slow, but I think she is plenty fast.”

“Eh? Oh, well, we were talking about a different standard for speed.”

“You mean in battle, right? Then she showed plenty of speed last night.”

Oh, thought Tenzou as he found himself speechless. Mary had to mean what Mitotsudaira had done in the battle the night before.

...That high-speed throw.

As if to agree with his thoughts, Mary smiled and spoke.

“She seemed to be thinking about something when we bathed in the spring today, but I think it was about that. So...yes. I think she will be fine,” she said.

“After all, people who don’t simply stew in their thoughts and instead search for an answer are sure to find that answer somewhere.”

Rudolf II sighed in the ring.

Two minutes had passed since the final attack, but there was still no sign of his opponent moving from the corner of the room where he had sent her.

...This is over.

My final job as Holy Roman Emperor is over, he thought.

Technically, he had never done any real work, but that was exactly why he thought what he did.

...As Holy Roman Emperor and as chancellor I did nothing that would give another academy a piece of M.H.R.R.

Still in the Reine des Garous's form, he tapped the right chest of his uniform, where Carlos I's memo was sealed.

As M.H.R.R. Emperor, he had protected the records left by the great chancellor of two generations prior.

And he had driven back a representative of Musashi, that academy that had quickly become the talk of every other academy.

He had shown the other academies that M.H.R.R.'s chancellor could easily handle an attack from a Musashi student.

"Will my brother think I was at least a little bit capable now?"

The enemy remained motionless, but he did not let his guard down. This was the Reine des Garous's daughter. Even if he had felt the blows land and even if she was battered and concussed, he doubted her bones had broken or that she had been fatally wounded.

...She is not moving because her heart is no longer struggling.

She had decided she was no match for him.

Once he had begun his high-speed combo, he had no longer sensed any ambition in her movements. The surprise and resignation on her face had been especially strong when he had taken on the Reine des Garous's form.

"I did something horrible to you, didn't I? I really did."

But it is over now, he thought while turning to the room's exit.

...In the end...

“Even as the emperor, I still don’t know what I am.”

As soon as he said that, he heard a noise.

It was a metallic noise.

In the corner of his vision, he saw silver hair swaying and rising on the western edge of the room.

The battle was not yet over.

Chapter 70: Confronters in the Metal Tower

CHAPTER 70

"Confronters in the Metal Tower"



What do you call the moment of understanding?
Point Allocation (Surprise)

What do you call the moment of understanding?

Point Allocation (Surprise)

The battle continued.

As long as there were opponents to fight and they both remained standing, the battle would not end.

But Mitotsudaira did not understand anything as she stood up. Two simple words remained in her heart.

...I'm sorry.

She felt she had been scolded by her mother again.

She thought her mother was kind, she enjoyed being around her, and she loved her, but the woman was incredibly scary when she got angry. She did not get angry often, but she would get really angry when Mitotsudaira did something dangerous or did not do what she was supposed to do.

If Mitotsudaira disobeyed her, she would be slammed into the ground.

When Mitotsudaira had been told she had to study but she instead stopped somewhere for fun on the way home, her mother had gotten angry. She had cried and asked if having fun was wrong. She had been afraid that she would not be allowed to have any fun from then on.

...But did she understand how scary she was?

Mitotsudaira did not know. She simply found her mother scary and wanted to avoid angering her if at all possible.

She had started studying in order to keep her from getting angry.

The same thing had happened eight years before. She had hoped she could get through to her mother at least a little, but she was still slammed into the ground.

At the time, she had sworn to herself she would never apologize, but...

...I'm sorry.

She had been forced to say those words and she had lost everything. She had

lost her pride, the friends she had gained through that pride, her reputation, and everything else. It may have been a misunderstanding, but in her mind, she had lost it all because she had disobeyed her mother.

It had happened again the other day and now it was happening yet again.

She could see her mother stepping down from the ring.

...I'm sorry.

She felt she needed to stay on the ground and apologize.

She was no match for her mother. She was no match for the woman's height, figure, strength, speed, techniques, or anything else.

She had no chance.

"..."

But, she thought.

Why am I standing?

There was no strength in the core of her body. She doubted she was standing straight. She could only feel her legs and their strength as they supported her.

Her field of vision shook, her eyes refused to focus, and she could only feel a vague heat throughout her body.

Why had she stood? Shouldn't she have stayed on the ground, apologized, and cried?

She was no match for this opponent, so she could only lose.

Everyone had seen what had happened eight years ago and the other day, so they would know she stood no chance. If she explained it to them, they would understand. She just had to say she was no match for this opponent, so she had not stood a chance. Surely they would all...

...No.

She had a sudden thought.

...Saying I simply didn't stand a chance and giving up...is wrong.

That isn't it, she thought.

There was something wrong with giving up because her enemy was powerful.

...That mistake...

She knew that mistake.

The enemy may be powerful, one might stand no chance, and everyone might urge them to give up...

...But I know someone who didn't understand any of that.

That's right, she thought with a nod in her heart.

For the first time in a long while, she had seen it in Mikawa just two months before.

A certain idiot had wanted to do something that was clearly impossible, but he had decided to continue on alone if he had to.

That idiot was her king.

He had been worried for her when she had decided to come here, but if she ever decided to do something without giving up, she knew what he would say.

"Don't push yourself too hard, okay? If things get dangerous, come on back."

But...

"If you're gonna do it, then go do it."

...Yes.

A scent reached her nose. It came from her collar. It was her king's scent from when she had covered up her mother's scent in the carriage and it was what had woken her up a moment ago.

"———"

Move. Please move.

Her mother was approaching. Her mother swung her leg to kick her through the air.

But, but, but, but that isn't what matters.

...This isn't about my mother.

I'm not supposed to think about her and apologize.

...I need to think about my king and get my body moving!

The kick scored a direct hit.

Several loud noises filled the room as a wave ran through the stockers and around a dozen of them broke and flew through the air.

The silver wolf's body smashed through them and slammed into the wall like a shell.

That was the result of the direct hit.

Meanwhile, Rudolf II finished the follow-through of his kick while shards of blades and stockers scattered like dried leaves.

...What is this?

"You are surprisingly durable."

He saw his enemy before him.

She was not unharmed, but she was not unmoving either. She was on all fours, struggling to get up from the floor.

The Reine des Garous' daughter tried to stand up. Her weak hands grasped the floor, her trembling elbows pointed toward the ceiling, and she shakily lifted her butt and slid her knees along the floor.

"———"

She forgot about trying to attack her enemy, she forgot just how defenseless she was, and she simply tried to stand.

"Is she moving on instinct? No... This is a conditioned reflex built up by her training and everyday life."

It did not matter how much damage she had taken or how great a disadvantage she had. As long as she could move, she would stand no matter what.

She was not just relying on a Loup-Garou's durability and regeneration.

She had to have trained both her body and her mind.

So...

"You are going to stand, aren't you?"

She did.

His enemy leaned on a tilted stocker with half her face stained by blood. Her right shoulder may have dislocated because it hung limply by her side. She was out of breath and terribly sweaty. Her entire body trembled and she swayed as she breathed.

Nevertheless, she was standing.

Rudolf II did not know what had led her to stand, but he did understand one thing.

She would not be brought down by his current methods.

Even if he tried to knock her unconscious, she would recover quickly with the regeneration of a Loup-Garou.

The only solution he could think of was to use a chokehold to asphyxiate her into unconsciousness, but he wanted to avoid grappling with her when he did not know what she would do.

There were more surefire methods. For example, he could use a weapon to decapitate her.

This would no longer be a mere sparring match, but she did not view it that way anymore either. The most important rule in sparring was the fact that you could lose, yet she was not allowing herself that.

...I can always lop off an arm to incapacitate her through blood loss.

She would pass out if she lost enough blood. Despite that plan, Rudolf held a spear.

It was the same one she had used against him at the beginning.

He raised it and threw it toward the girl leaning against the stocker.

And he used his full strength.

Mitotsudaira saw her mother moving.

...Oh...

I've made her that angry, she thought.

After all, she refused to do what her mother said, she refused to stay down, and she refused to apologize.

That was why her mother had thrown that spear. Not to knock her to the ground, but to take her life.

There was no helping that. She had disobeyed her mother. She was listening to someone other than her mother. The real problem was how that other person's words fit so much better with her own beliefs.

There was only one thing on her mind.

...I will not give up.

When was it that her king had told her that?

The spear flew toward her stomach.

If it hit, she would not escape unharmed, but her body would not move.

Just like before, she begged it to move yet it would not. There was nothing she could do.

But she still had the same thought.

...I will not give up.

And she had decided to continue disobeying her mother even if the spear hit her.

After all, she remembered something.

The day before, when her mother had captured her and forced her to apologize, she had been unable to do anything, yet her king had said something to her.

"Don't apologize."

And...

“Because you’re my knight.”

Judge. As long as I am your knight, I will no longer apologize to you.

I will only speak other words to you.

But what should she do about this lethal attack when her body would not move?

...That’s right.

What could she say when she was told not to apologize?

...Yes.

I will not give up.

She had just one thing to say, but it was not that she would fight or that she would defend.

...I will go.

That word encompassed both fighting and defending.

...I will go.

She had used that same word long ago.

She had used it when living with her parents. She had used it when she had finished studying and was heading out to play.

Her heart had been so much lighter when she had already done what she was supposed to do, but had she done what she was supposed to here?

I have.

...Yes.

She had not given up and she had stood, so...

...So...

“I will go.”

A solid sound rang out.

It was the sound of the spear hitting its mark after being launched and tearing through the air.

However, it did not hit the silver wolf. It hit the wall behind her.

It had missed its true target.

“———”

But Rudolf II saw where the silver wolf was standing.

Her position was odd.

Just as before, she was leaning on the stocker by the wall.

But at some point, she had moved less than a meter to the right.

Her position had shifted just after he had thrown the spear.

The exhausted and injured silver wolf stood on her own two feet between the broken stocker and fallen weapon. She had a blank look on her face, but...

...What?

Rudolf II did not know when she had moved there.

It was only the distance of a single large step, but...

...How?

He did not know. He knew he had not seen it and he felt that meant he had let his guard down, but...

“...”

He saw the silver wolf wobble and almost fall to her knees, but...

“———”

Her position shifted again.

She briefly vanished and suddenly reappeared a step away.

Rudolf II watched as the silver wolf raised her unfocused eyes and exhaled with a hand on the nearby stocker.

...What is this?

There was something odd about the movement of her hand, the movement of her breath, and the movement as she coughed.

...What? What is this!?

They were all missing their midpoint. He could see the beginning of the action, but the next thing he knew, the movement had reached its end point.

When she placed her hand on the stocker, he saw her shoulder begin to move and her hand was suddenly already on the stocker. When she coughed, he saw her begin to breathe in and she had suddenly already bent forward after coughing.

He could not see the movement in between.

And she moved again.

With her eyes still unfocused and her body wobbling unsteadily, she started down the center of the pathway created by the destruction.

“———”

She vanished and reappeared yet again. She had likely tried to lean on the stocker, but when he saw her next, she was standing unsteadily in the center of the pathway with both hands raised.

The movement looked meaningless, but he realized the stocker she faced was shaking back and forth and creaking.

She had to have struck it during the unseen middle section of her movement.

...This is...

Rudolf understood what had happened.

...This is a ridiculous explosion of instantaneous strength.

“There is actually a trick to moving quickly.”

Tenzou was embarrassed with himself for only understanding after Mary told him about Mitotsudaira’s state the night before and how she had thrown a stone in the spring.

...I get it now.

“Mitotsudaira-dono must be beginning to understand that trick.”

“What is that trick, Master Tenzou?”

“Strength.”

He clenched his fist, held it up toward Mary, and shook it to tell her to clench her empty hand into a fist too.

But...

“Clench your fist even tighter.”

“Eh? Oh, okay. Is this enough?”

“Yes, that is fine.”

He raised his fist in front of her face again and lightly swung it from the elbow.

“Can you swing your wrist using a snap from the elbow like that?”

“Judge.”

Mary tried to swing the wrist of her clenched fist a few times.

“I can, but only at a limited angle.”

“If you want to swing it over a wider angle, you have to focus on the action and that slows it down.”

But he opened his hand and waved his fingers around.

“How about like this? Try swinging your wrist using a snap from the elbow again.”

“Judge.”

She opened her hand and swung it. Her movement and the hopeful expression on her face were exactly what he had hoped for.

“Judge.” He nodded. “When you spread your hand, you lose all strength, don’t you? But you can move your wrist more easily and more quickly. After all, the movement of your wrist actually comes from your elbow and your wrist moves more quickly when it is lighter.”

“You mean,” added Mary, “if you keep the hand or foot looser, it will move more freely and more quickly?”

“Judge. You only use your strength at the very beginning and you gradually move it from the source of the movement out toward the end of the movement. When you swing a sword, you move the acceleration from your shoulder, to your elbow, and then to your wrist, correct?”

“Judge.” Mary gave a nod of understanding. “So speed comes from relaxing your strength?”

“Exactly right,” confirmed Tenzou while coming to understand something.

The night before, Mitotsudaira had not known whether she was tense or relaxed due to having her sense of pain cut off.

...So she did not know what had happened when she experienced that unexpected speed.

“Mitotsudaira-dono has always been the power type and she only knew how to use her strength. That means she never let her strength lapse, just like when you lift something heavy or press against a wall.”

Before, the Reine des Garous had called Mitotsudaira “diligent”.

She was solid, tense, and could not move lightly. That certainly was a “diligent” use of her strength.

...And she is the kind of person to “diligently” stick to her role as the power type.

So he clenched his fist and held it up again.

“This is what Mitotsudaira has been doing until now.”

He opened his hand and moved his elbow for a snap of the wrist.

“But if she catches on, this could be what she does from now on.”

“How do you distinguish between the two?”

“That is simple.”

He swung his opened hand again, but this time he did not just leave it open. As it moved over a longer distance and accelerated, he closed it. It was open at the

starting point and closed at the end point.

“This is how you would do it as a punch. You want speed when you throw the punch, so you keep your fist loose and open. But after building up speed and strength over the longer range of movement, you form a fist to do more damage in the end. That is why anyone who sees it done at higher speeds can only comprehend the starting point and ending point.”

He breathed in.

“If Mitotsudaira-dono masters this, one would only be able to see the beginning and end of her movements.”

Mitotsudaira did not know what had happened to her.

...*H-huh?*

She was terribly off balance. Whether she was wobbling or tripping over something, her body was moving unsteadily back and forth. She tried to lean on the stocker next to her, but she ran into it with unexpected force. She was ashamed of her behavior.

She could not gather her strength properly and her mind would not clear up. For one, she did not know why her mother was here.

...*Um...*

She could not remember. She was fairly certain she had come to get Rudolf II's memo and had ended up fighting him. She thought she had been badly beaten, but it seemed a fair bit of what had happened had been knocked from her mind. The fact that she did not remember the inconvenient parts seemed very unlike her, but she was grateful.

However, she did not like that she was only moving with her joints. Her ankles and knees were shaking, her body leaned forward, and she lacked the dignity of a knight. *I cannot let my king see me like this*, she thought as she noticed a few objects on the floor.

They were parts of her uniform that she must have removed at some point. They were the hard points for her waist and neck, the skirt, and the coat.

Removing them would lower her defenses, so when had she removed them, assuming it had been her to do so?

...I don't know.

Her dim thoughts were interrupted.

“?”

Her mother was coming. *Oh, no*, she thought. Her mother's movements were trouble. Her mother would likely attack with her claws by using a right hook as she passed by Mitotsudaira's right side.

If it hit, it could easily tear holes in her body. *My king would probably make a perverted joke out of that*, she thought with a mental glare, but she also decided to at least try to avoid her mother's attack.

However, it was obviously far too late. She could not move very much, yet her mother's approach was fast and she did not have much room to move back.

“Oh.”

The next thing she knew, her mother was diagonally in front of her and had finished swinging her arm.

The woman's claws had not hit her.

Huh? thought Mitotsudaira. *It isn't like her to miss. Did she intentionally miss as a warning or something?*

But then she gently hit the stocker to her left.

Huh? she thought again. *This is the stocker I bumped into before.*

But it had been two steps behind her.

...Did it move up behind me on its own?

That was when she had a realization.

“...Eh?”

Something was not right.

Mitotsudaira came to her senses and realized something strange was

happening to her body.

But something else happened at the same time.

“Kh!”

Weight suddenly filled her entire body. Her numbed body awoke and her senses of pain and weight returned.

...What is this!?

She remembered what had happened up until now and the sudden weight just about caused her limp body to give out below her.

“Have you woken up?”

Her mother’s voice sounded both curious and relieved.

...No!! That is not my mother!

It was Rudolf II.

That definite enemy swung his claws at great speed once more while untwisting his body.

...What should I do!?

Mitotsudaira made a split-second decision.

If this attack hit her, it would likely pierce straight through her.

In her previous battles, she had always relied on her durable body and the great strength that let her stand firm, but she would lose if she tried that here.

If she let this enemy hit her with all his strength, her own strength would not be enough.

...So...

She could sense what she had been doing earlier.

She had been moving at tremendous speed. That extreme short-range acceleration was difficult to control.

She did not know the details of how she did it, but she could remember what had happened.

The night before, she had thrown a stone when her body was still unsteady from her injuries.

And just now, she had gained such great strength when her body was unsteady from the damage taken here.

What was the common point between the two?

As soon as she asked that question...

“— — —!!”

Rudolf II's claws struck.

A great sound of impact rang out.

Rudolf II checked on his stance after swinging his arm: *An excellent movement.*
...*But!*

He could see his prey flying through the air, but something was different from before.

His prey was no longer the prey.

The silver wolf had been knocked away and leaped through the air, but...

“...!”

Her heels slid along the ground by the wall and she remained standing with her guard still up.

She had not fallen.

She had raised her left arm in defense, so the clothing was torn and the skin below was torn and bleeding.

The wolf's entire body trembled with tension and wobbled from the pain and lingering numbness. The sudden movement caused her to breathe heavily and her eyes had still not focused.

Nevertheless, she stood there with her guard up.

She had endured his attack and remained standing.

Rudolf II observed her in the Reine des Garous' form.

...I have no sense of pain, but my sight and other senses picked up something different this time.

When he had drop-kicked her to the wall earlier, he had felt her resisting the impact he was giving her.

But this time...

...Instead of resisting, she moved back to redirect it.

"Yes," he said as he analyzed her. "You are no longer relying on your durable body to hold your ground by force. You moved back with that strange high-speed movement you demonstrated before, didn't you? And you did so while taking my attack."

That pointed to one fact.

"You successfully moved back in the very instant that you took my attack."

The silver wolf was not listening to the words directed at her.

She took erratic breath after erratic breath and sweat dripped from her brow.

That showed she had released her extreme tension. That showed that what she had done had essentially been a gamble.

...She did not know if it would work, but she tried it anyway.

But she finally did something else: she breathed deeply in.

"Nn."

She began to tilt to the right.

"Hh."

And she immediately corrected her stance. She used the quick movement to have her shoulder tug strongly on her limp right arm.

"————"

The dislocated shoulder popped back into place with a short, dry sound. Her hand instantly clenched, her elbow bent, her wrist was lifted in front of her face, and...

“Owww!!!”

...That woke me up!!

I shouldn't have done that, she added, but she was back all the same.

Her mind had cleared and her body was finally reconnected.

She felt pain.

She was exhausted.

She felt shaking, sluggishness, heat, and all sorts of other things.

“Judge.”

But she understood what all the previous attacks had done to her.

...I relaxed all the excess strength in my body.

Those attacks had been too powerful to resist. It had taken someone on her mother's or Rudolf II's level to do actual damage to her and their attacks had smashed through the strength she had gathered to resist them.

...Yes.

She could not quite put it in words, but...

“I feel light.”

Simply moving her lips brought pain, but she could actually move her hand to wipe the tears of pain from her eyes.

It was far from perfect, but she had recovered.

...Yes. This will probably only be a short-term fight.

But she had not given up and so she knew she could fight.

After all, Rudolf II had attacked her in her mother's form...

“And I redirected the force.”

She had not known if she could do that. That was different from resisting and holding her ground.

...This must be the same as my mother's high-speed movement.

She doubted it was exactly the same. She was inexperienced and had only just begun to understand the technique.

...But if I can do it, I can keep doing it and learn to do it even better.

So she breathed in.

When she exhaled, she wiped away her tears and turned her gold eyes to her opponent.

“I will name myself again. I am the 5th Special Duty Officer of Musashi Ariadust Academy’s Chancellor’s Officers...”

She wiped blood from her face, licked it from her finger with her lips, and continued.

“...and Musashi’s First Knight, Mitotsudaira ‘Argent Loup’ Nate.”

“Testament,” said Rudolf II with a nod.

As M.H.R.R.’s Holy Roman Emperor and Chancellor, he had to reply in kind if a knight named herself, so he returned to his male body and replied.

“I am Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor and Chancellor of M.H.R.R.”

He then changed form and prepared his fighting stance. He searched for the optimal female form and opened his mouth to speak.

...I will maintain my imperial behavior.

“How about you come at me? Or do you like making an emperor go to all the effort?”

The wolf moved first and the human moved second.

A moment later, their movements intersected.


“...”

Neither one of them stopped fighting.

Chapter 71: Understanders in the Metal Tower

CHAPTER 71

"Understanders in the Metal Tower"



This calms you
Keeps your heart from crying out
As it trembles with joy
And instead provides the strength to move
Point Allocation (Confrontation)

This calms you

Keeps your heart from crying out

As it trembles with joy

And instead provides the strength to move

Point Allocation (Confrontation)

A deep sound came from the sky.

“The level of force has changed,” said Mary as she looked up to the tower.

Tenzou nodded as he looked in the same direction.

...What is going to happen?

He knew the battle was growing longer.

The two guard women said the sounds coming from the sky were “different from normal” and the Reine des Garous said it was “far from over”.

But Tenzou could not help but speak up.

“Mitotsudaira-dono had to have been injured. Even with her regeneration, I don’t see how a longer battle would be-...”

“Oh? That girl may not know how to handle herself, but I can say one thing for sure.”

The Reine des Garous cut him off to provide her own opinion.

“The standard tactic of the Loup Garou race is to fight a short but decisive battle.”

The entire circular room had become a battlefield.

Far from just using the floor, the two combatants also used the stockers, the curved walls, and the ceiling as footing for accelerating or changing direction as the two of them intersected and pursued each other.

Their paths continually crossed.

Mitotsudaira knocked back her enemy's charge with a kick and landed on a stocker. Rudolf II accelerated by jumping from the floor and ceiling several times like a ricocheting bullet and he threw a piercing kick toward her from above.

But by that time, she had instantly leaped to a stocker behind her.

“———”

From there, she jumped to the wall with a swing of her body and kicked with her toes as if to dig into the curving surface. Her movements appeared light, but her repeated and intersecting footwork allowed her to run along the wall.

She ran around the room.

Rudolf II pursued her by leaning forward atop a broken stocker and releasing his built-up strength in a great leap. He flew straight for the wall, but he made sure to rotate around as he did so the soles of his feet landed on the wall. He ran after Mitotsudaira along the wall while crouched “down” against it.

Meanwhile, Mitotsudaira back-stepped around on the wall and stuck a hand into her hair.

She prepared a sword she had grabbed when standing on the stocker and hidden in her hair.

And there was more than one. She had enough swords to hold between all of her fingers.

She threw them. It was a weak movement of her shoulders and elbows, but...

“———”

When the swords were released from her fingers, they flew toward Rudolf II with instantaneous force.

He did not bother avoiding them. He grabbed the first one between his fingers and tossed it up to the ceiling.

“Did you think the emperor would not have been trained in swordplay!?”

Several solid sounds rang out as all of the swords were knocked away, but as he looked through the reflecting light of the blades, he saw the silver wolf jumping. That silver-haired girl kicked powerfully off the wall, rotated upside

down in midair, and placed a piercing step onto the ceiling.

So Rudolf II also jumped. He had already started to fall due to his greater weight, so he stabbed a sword into the ceiling and kicked off the wall while pulling himself toward that weapon. And in the instant he passed by the sword, he kicked off of it.

He had caught up, so their powers intersected.

She deflected his stabbing hand, he avoided her claws, and their kicks collided.

“————”

They both performed a midair flip and landed in the room’s central ring.

Rudolf II stood on the northern post while the silver wolf stood on the southern post.

Rudolf II crossed his arms and threw out his chest while the silver wolf let out a heated breath.

Immediately afterwards, the two collided in the center of the ring.

The sound of the collision rang out and more followed with increasing speed.

Mitotsudaira did her best to control her trembling heart.

...Calm down!

She needed to control her heart at the moment, not her body.

She desperately held back the desire to rely on her strength that was trying to control her body.

After all, the overwhelming difference between her and her mother was an issue of speed and she could see the answer to that in her body at the moment. She was beginning to understand.

To oversimplify the answer, it was to not rely on her strength.

A certain moment had led to this realization. When battling the automatons the night before, she had thrown a stone, thinking it would not hit in time, but its unexpected speed had allowed it to hit and had laid the groundwork for

ending the battle.

While wondering what had happened, she had tried throwing a small stone in the spring, but as expected, it had not worked.

There was a simple reason for that.

When throwing the stone in the spring, her fingers had been tensed with strength from beginning to end. She had been so focused on how to produce that kind of speed that she had remained tense from the start of the throw to its finish.

That was the wrong way.

That constant tension was not a throw.

...That was pushing it.

To throw it, she had to release it.

She had to only place her fingers on the stone to control it, swing her shoulder, swing her elbow enough to make sure it was not fixed in place, and do the same with her wrist. Each time, she could only gather her strength at the very beginning and then throw with each joint in order to release the stone.

In other words, she “threw” by swinging her shoulder, elbow, wrist, and fingers in that order.

And if she built up some force to begin with, the stone would fly with even more force.

Her entire body was the same.

She could not keep her body tense and push it forward. If she dug her toes into the floor, bent her relaxed body, and threw herself by pulling with her toes, she could launch herself quickly forward.

It was a lot like bending a ruler to launch it forward. She built up her strength before moving, released it in phases, and poured as much initial speed as possible into the leading edge of her movement.

...This is nothing like before.

In a power-focused battle, she needed to hold her ground and thus took a

stance centered on her heels, but now she stood on her toes, quickly bent and released her body, and turned at her destination to reach for her enemy.

...This is...

It was much like a dance.

She had yet to learn how to move her body properly and she would occasionally give a jerking shake and lose her speed.

But this was all she had.

This was what she had to do now.

So she repeatedly used the stockers or the walls as footing even though they only gave her enough space to stand on her tiptoes and a single mistake would mean falling.

When she got the timing wrong, the object she meant to throw would pull on her and cause her to shake.

When moving, it felt like jumping along small, round stones. To make sure she did not trip on those stones, she placed her foot firmly down, gathered her strength, and released it all at once.

She focused on her movements like that to allow her body to learn.

She continued on, jumping again and again.

...Honestly.

This was so very strange and made her wonder what she had been doing all this time.

No, it was just that she had never before been faced with a battle that required this kind of movement. With her silver chains and strength, she had been able to endure any attack and crush any opponent just by keeping her strength built up inside her.

But that meant she was always tensed up and it slowed her down.

She had realized that way of fighting was a constant habit when her enemy had smashed her body.

His strikes had outdone the strength built up inside her and she had

abandoned the strength she had subconsciously kept as a form of resistance.

“I feel so light.”

Yes, she thought as she realized something.

She finally understood why her mother had treated her like a child.

“I...”

She had not known how to “use” her own body’s strength.

She had been “drawing out” that strength, but she had not been “using” it.

She understood that now.

How pathetic, she thought. How could I think I was protecting anyone like that?

But did her mother understand something else? While she had only now realized how to use her body to fight...

.../...

She had long ago learned how to get back on her feet without giving up.

Rudolf II felt some resistance from his enemy.

As the two of them continued their exchange of attacks and speed, he could tell his enemy’s form was quickly growing clear.

...Oh, my.

That inexperienced being was clarifying and settling on her strength and techniques at great enough speed to elicit that silent voice of admiration.

At first, she had pulled back her attack in confusion three out of ten times, but now it was only one in twenty or even thirty times and her attacks were growing more accurate.

...Excellent.

She had likely grasped how to make use of her body during their interaction.

This had also happened to the others he had fought here. In their battles with

him, they had gained a thorough understanding of their own abilities and so they would thank him afterwards.

But there was one thing different about the silver wolf before him now: this wolf was clearly trying to surpass him.

She refused to give up.

And Rudolf sensed something from the persistent wolf. The resistance from the attacks and speed of her growth had yet to reach completion.

She was still incomplete.

And it was that lack of completion that allowed her to never give up.

...No.

There was more to it than that. She had stood back up even before realizing she was incomplete. That was a way of life carved into her instincts, so her own will no longer matters.

...I'm so jealous.

What about me? wondered Rudolf II.

He could change his form and alter his abilities, so he had to be incomplete as well. But...

“———”

I have given up, haven't I? he thought.

He had accepted himself, but he had given up and not hoped for anything more.

There was a reason for that.

He did not know who he was, his parents had not acted like parents, he could only understand others via his imagination, and even his position had been given to him by others.

He himself had never been anywhere.

He had never been his own person.

...We are a lot alike.

He had a few elements in common with the girl before him. She had been sent to Musashi by Hexagone Française and even her mother had become her enemy. And yet...

...I'm so jealous.

Even if nothing else, he envied her refusal to give up.

And the persistent form he sensed in the resistance was changing further.

She was like a newborn beast. Desiring its perfect form and wishing to live, the small beast would stand on its four legs and learn to walk and roar.

“———”

As he observed his changing opponent, Rudolf II nodded in his heart and said what he needed to say.

“Victory will be mine!!”

She was changing, but how far would she go?

If his enemy was going to change and better herself, he only needed to reach an optimal form that outdid hers.

He had pioneered the technique of changing oneself as a weapon.

“...!”

So he transformed.

Mitotsudaira saw pure ferocity and it was in constant flux.

Rudolf II continued to transform in order to match not just her attacks but also her movements and speed.

For speed, he took a nimble form. For strength, he took a well-built form. For techniques, he took a skilled form.

By rapidly changing himself, he matched every part of her. But...

“———”

Mitotsudaira stole his speed, took his techniques, and surpassed his strength.

She threw those elements straight back at him and further improved herself.

Her breathing grew heavy and sweat covered her, but...

...This isn't over yet!!

She was still far from matching her mother. She knew that from her experience of being defeated and beaten to a pulp, but...

...I will reach her!!

She could tell all resignation was vanishing from her heart and resolve was taking its place.

She was fighting.

Her confidence in that allowed her to build her resolve to defeat the enemy before her eyes. By defeating him, she could declare this emperor and chancellor "imperfect" and put him at ease.

She had thought up a way to make him feel pain. It had come to her quickly inside this metal tower, so she had decided to try it out as soon as she had a chance.

She raised her speed and strengthened her attacks that could already knock him into the air.

"!" As she danced, her moving feet sounded out on the metal ring.

She was exhausted and injured, but it all turned to heat with every breath she took and that told her that her body was there.

Yes, she thought. Even the negatives have meaning here.

She could tell they were both improving themselves each time they picked up speed, attacked, or defended.

They seemed to be consuming the battle to grow.

She then noticed something about Rudolf II's rapidly changing form.

...He's stopped changing?

No, that was not it. His transformations were gradually approaching a single form.

That was likely the form he felt could oppose anything and everything.

It had to be something he was unable to create before. It was his truly ideal form that he could not picture in his head and needed to experience to create.

That form would allow him to survive on his own no matter what happened.

And if he had created that here...

...It can't be...

That meant he too was inexperienced.

So Mitotsudaira sent more resistance his way.

“———!”

Suddenly, wind exploded in front of her.

She knew what had happened.

Rudolf II had completed his new form and he had quickly surpassed her still inexperienced self.

“...!?”

He appeared behind her.



Rudolf II

Mitotsudaira saw her opponent as she turned around.

...Blonde hair, tall, blue eyes, huge breasts, 1st special duty officer... No, wait. This isn't a word association game.

Her opponent moved too fast for her eyes to keep up. He kept low but swung his body.

...!

Before she could fully turn, he jumped toward her back and she was surrounded by wind.

...Oh, no!

Her crouched enemy had wrapped his arms around her waist from behind. He then bent backwards, lifted her by the waist, and gave a yell.

“German suplex!!”

Rudolf II used his special attack.

Instead of throwing or releasing his opponent, he kept his arms around them, bent his body, and dropped them backwards.

He slammed the back of their head into the metal floor to knock them out.

That was his plan.

Even if she absolutely refused to give up, there was nothing she could if she was knocked out cold. He doubted she would give up, but he would have left by the time she came to.

...I offer this match up to you!

But he would be the winner.

Convinced of his victory, he enacted his plan.

To drop his opponent's head to the floor, it was crucial he made an arching bridge with his back. Otherwise, his own head would be caught between the floor and her back.

He picked up speed as he perfected the steep angle of his back and he tightly

clutched his arms to pull his opponent from the floor.

“Hoo!!”

With that grunt of effort, he completed the technique.

The object in his arms would be slammed head-first into the floor behind him.

However, something was not quite right.

The enemy was no longer in his arms.

“What is this!?”

His clutching arms held nothing but empty air.

Mitotsudaira had vanished.

Soon thereafter, his own high speed arch slammed the top of his own head into the metal ring.

After a great rumbling sound, Rudolf II stood all alone, forming a three-point bridge with his legs and head.

“Hmm...”

After some thought, he realized what had happened.

“Is that what happened!?”

Still forming his bridge, he spread his clutching arms and explained.

“Your chest is simply so flat that my arms were not enough to hook onto you, so you slipped right out!!”

He knew the perfect way of describing it.

“A flat-chest evasion!!”

A moment later, he was loudly slammed against the ceiling.

Her face bright red, Mitotsudaira had made a full-speed approach and thrown a kick right into his back.

It was a powerful kick. After crashing into the ceiling, Rudolf II stuck there

without falling for about eight seconds.

Finally, he peeled away and gently fell back down.

“Take this!!”

Thirty-eight longswords stabbed into him as he fell. Four great axes whipped up the wind as they flew by and audibly severed his limbs.

The axes stabbed into the ceiling and he fell, unable to remove the swords without his limbs. He tried to move, but the countless blades entering him from below prevented not just his joints but also his muscles from moving properly.

However, his severed limbs turned to bloody smoke in midair. The deep cuts of the blade were also being closed by his divine protection, so the swords were about to fall out.

He would likely regenerate and remove the blades before hitting the ring, but...

“...?”

Something struck Rudolf II from below as he fell face-up.

The impact that shook his torso and slammed him back into the ceiling came from two hammers.

Rudolf II realized he had been pasted to the ceiling once more.

The blow seemed to have reversed up and down.

Not just one but two hammers large enough to smash stone had dug into his back and created deep depressions in his body.

...But I still feel no pain!

With that thought, he tried to place his palms on the ceiling and raise his elbows. He was trying to fight the momentum pressing him into the ceiling so he could jump back down.

However, his arms had yet to regenerate. Neither had his legs.

...What!?

Timing-wise, he should have been surrounded by bloody smoke and his limbs

should have returned.

But they had not.

“Why not!?”

He looked to the floor behind him and saw the regenerating smoke down below.

That red mist had yet to reach him.

...Was that the purpose of the hammer blow?

“You knocked me away so the regenerating smoke couldn’t reach me!?”

He knew why she had done so.

...To buy the time she needs to gather her next weapon!

As if to prove him right, a metallic light shot between him and the ceiling as he peeled away from it.

As expected, it was another hammer.

However, it was not just a hammer. Something was wrapped around the handle.

“One of the ring’s chains!?”

As soon as he voiced that question, the chain was pulled from below and the hammer end also pulled back down. It wrapped around him like a whip as he was peeled from the ceiling again.

The hammer acted as a weight and the chain wrapped tightly around him, the many blades, and the two hammers in his back.

The blades were stabbed back into him and the hammers broke through skin and flesh until they entered his body and might as well have been part of his skeleton.

“...Hoo!”

Constricted, his lungs had less room and his breaths grew smaller.

But, he thought. I do not need to breathe. If I asphyxiate, my regeneration will simply begin from there. This squeezing is meaningless.

Also, the bloody regenerating smoke was approaching him. With that, his limbs would regenerate and he could immediately break free of this chain.

The bloody smoke reached him and began to form small spirals to remake his limbs, but...

“You did this to me earlier, didn’t you?”

After that comment from below, a sudden tug reached his vision.

It came from the chain.

“Spin around!!”

He was ripped from the bloody smoke and the red spirals came apart in midair as if confused.

A moment later, his entire body crashed into the wall along with the great weight.

The wind roared, destruction followed the sound of the chain, and great impacts played the tower like a musical instrument.

It was a bell.

With the five hundred meter tower as the bell, Rudolf II as the bell’s clapper, and Mitotsudaira as the musician, it produced great noise.

“...!”

Mitotsudaira truly went all out this time. She instantaneously accelerated her entire body to throw the arm holding the chain. The chain extended like a solid bar, tore through the wind, and struck the wall as a weight.

The air shook and the metal roared.

But she had already released the next strike. The chain would briefly form an arc, but quickly go taut with the weight trailing only ever so slightly behind.

“...!!”

The weight tore through the stockers like a paper forest. Weapons flew through the air, but the weight broke through them all as she spun it around

again for more speed.

They all broke.

The sounds of breaking metal acted as accompaniment and the whipping wind turned the metal snow into a blizzard.

The room had grown stormy, but Mitotsudaira accelerated further. She spun her body, pulled her arms, and poured more speed into the chain she hauled around.

“Break!”

As she slammed him into the walls, she never let his speed drop, she continued to raise it, and she suddenly increased the frequency of the impacts.

“Is that a bell?”

Mary tilted her head and Tenzou saw Naito frantically shaking her head behind the girl.

...H-how am I supposed to explain this?

The tower’s two guard women were looking up in confusion and the Reine des Garous looked up into the sky with a hand on her cheek like always.

...Is she measuring it?

The Reine des Garous was lightly tapping her toes on the ground. At first, she was matching the grandiose metallic sounds from overhead, but before long, she was filling the gaps as well. It almost looked like she was recreating the steps taken by the bell’s ringer.

“Are you worried about Mitotsudaira-dono?”

“Oh? All skilled people are short-lived, you know?”

“Ah! I’m short-lived! I’m seriously about as short-lived as a mosquito, so give me a feel of those boob-Why are you two guard ladies glaring at me, too!? Like you know what kind of person I am! How about I feel you up, too!”

Fearing a drop in the Far East’s reputation, Tenzou decided to calm the idiot down. However, the ringing overhead had started at even intervals, but it was

now much more random and the sound was growing in intensity.

“Doesn’t this sound like a debt collector knocking on the door?” asked Naito.

“What’s even going on in there?” asked the idiot. “That’s gotta be Nate doing it, so that Rudo-whatever guy’s gotta be dead, right?”

“N-not to worry.” The smiling woman looked back up at the tower with a slight shadow hanging over her expression. “Impacts like this are not enough for Master Rudolf to feel pain.”

So...

“All of this you’re hearing will be ultimately meaningless.”

Rudolf II spoke among the flurry of impacts.

“This isn’t working!”

He was slammed into the wall.

“This isn’t working!”

He was thrown into the wall.

“This isn’t working at all!”

He still felt no pain.

The process sped up and the power of the impacts grew far greater than before. He deemed the frequency of the barrage to be truly wonderful.

But...

...It doesn't hurt!

When his body shook from the impacts, he briefly felt something like an itch, but...

“That is not enough to call pain!!”

The noise was tremendous, the impacts travelled through him, and his entire body broke, but he immediately regenerated within the chain. The bloody smoke of his limbs was floating around and had yet to catch up to him as he was quickly flung this way and that.

...But this is useless.

“It may look impressive, but it isn’t enough to reach me!”

He was thrown into the wall and destroyed, but none of it hurt. Wasn’t there a more constant kind of pain that left his entire body unusable?

“!!”

He crashed into the wall again.

It was just more of the same.

...Don’t you have anything more?

He wished for something else, but it seemed his enemy was only going to continue.

It was meaningless, so he thought about escaping this situation.

His body was currently filled with swords and hammers and wrapped up tight. He considered taking a smaller form to escape, but he knew the chain would simply tighten further. Also, the two hammers in his back acted as cushioning that prevented the chain from tearing completely through him. It was a well thought out method of tying him up.

To escape, he would need his limbs. The bloody smoke currently could not reach him as he was swung around, but its speed was starting to catch up. That meant he only had to lower his speed.

...I need to disturb her!

He changed his form in order to affect her mentally.

“Nate!”

He had taken the Reine des Garous’s form.

“What do you think you’re doing to your own mother!?”

He was immediately thrown into the wall.

“Was it just me or was that one especially strong?” asked the idiot.

“I just felt a strange chill for some reason,” said the Reine des Garous.

“Oh?” Mary tilted her head and pointed up. “Master Tenzou. I see a light.”

Tenzou and the others looked up and saw a line of light running across the tower’s outer wall.

“The wall...is breaking?”

Oh, no, thought Rudolf II.

His opponent’s power had definitely increased after he took the Reine des Garous’s form.

...Sh-she shows no mercy even against her mother.

She must have had a harsh upbringing, the poor thing. It is true she lacks a lot of feminine appeal in certain places. If only she could transform like me.

But while he pitied her, this increase in speed was not good. The bloody smoke would never catch up now.

And so he changed into yet another form.

...This one is sure to work!

He had seen Musashi’s chancellor and student council president on the broadcast from Mikawa, so he took on that form.

While swinging the chain around with all her strength, Mitotsudaira saw her king’s face at the end of the horizontally swinging chain.

“Nate!”

Her king was speaking in her king’s voice. It was the same voice she always heard and he pleaded her with a desperate look on his face.

“Please stop!”

She knew this plea was fake, but it still moved her heart.

...M-my king!

To push her moving heart further, his words continued. It was a phrase she had heard him say countless times.

“Did I do something wrong!?”

Her heart gave a full nod and she slammed him into the wall like usual.

“It broke!” shouted Naito.

Light appeared on the tower’s top floor and they heard something like shattering glass.

The crack in the metal blossomed in the night sky, its edges glowed from the light within, and the scattering fragments reflected that light into the sky. Finally, a resplendent object was thrown into the heavens.

When the smiling woman saw it, her expression grew harsh.

“Master Rudolf!?”

Study:

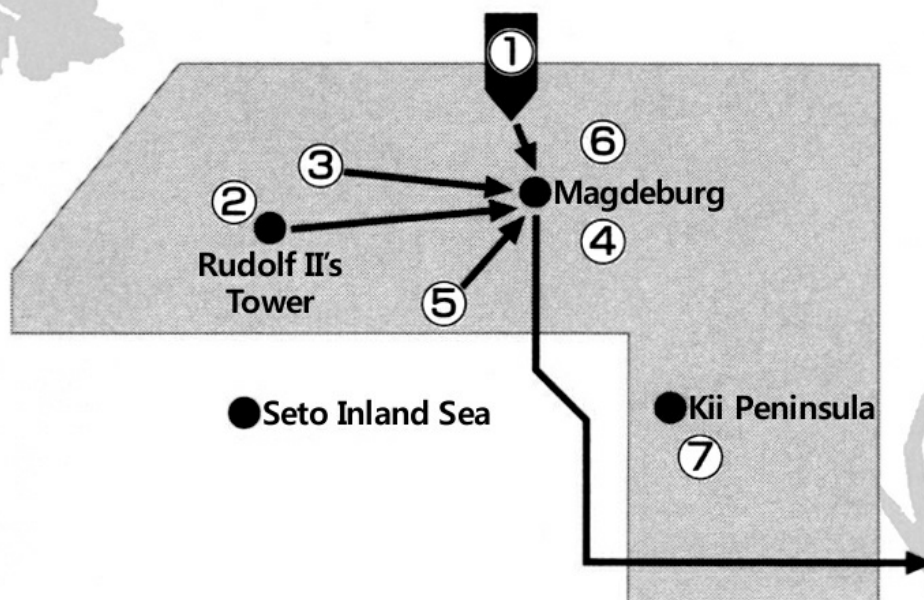
● Positions of the Various Factions and Their Plans ●



"Sis! Sis! Nate's having some fun up above, but what's going on around us and in the other nations!?"



"Heh heh heh. Fun brother, here is a diagram of the current situation."



- ① Musashi : After meeting up with Toori in the Magdeburg region, they will travel from the Seto Inland Sea, through the Kii Peninsula, and to Mikawa where they will begin the Battle of Mikatagahara with Yoshitsune.
- ② Toori's Group : See how Mitotsudaira's battle ends and head to the Magdeburg region?
- ③ Hexagone Française : Rushing to Magdeburg from the west.
- ④ M.H.R.R. Catholics 1 : Katsuie and Narimasa are besieging Magdeburg.
- ⑤ M.H.R.R. Catholics 2 : Traveling to Magdeburg after the battle with K.P.A. Italia.
- ⑥ M.H.R.R. Protestants: Defending Magdeburg.
- ⑦ P.A. Oda : Will intercept the Musashi when it enters their territory.



"Once again, it looks like there's gonna be a huge traffic jam."



"You're a part of all this, you know?"

Positions of the Various Factions and Their Plans

Toori: Sis! Sis! Nate's having some fun up above, but what's going on around us and in the other nations!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Fun brother, here is a diagram of the current situation.

Below 2: Rudolf II's Tower

Below 6: Magdeburg

Above 7: Kii Peninsula

Below 5: Seto Inland Sea

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Toori: Once again, it looks like there's gonna be a huge traffic jam.

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Chapter 72: Wolf of the Audience Chamber

CHAPTER 72

"Wolf of the Audience Chamber"

What falls from the sky
And reverberates across the earth?
Point Allocation (Howl)

What falls from the sky

And reverberates across the earth?

Point Allocation (Howl)

Rudolf II was thrown out into the sky at over five hundred meters up.

His opponent had let go of the hammer chain binding him, so he was tossed into the sky just like the hammer throw.

Still, he had more than thirty swords piercing him, two hammers embedded inside him, and a lack of all four limbs. Almost his entire body had been smashed by the many impacts, but...

“Ha haaaaa!”

He laughed in the female form he thought had the most beautiful smile. He had broken through the tower’s outer wall and he had reached the same height as the tower’s roof.

...Is that what this was!?

“Did you think you could make me feel pain by throwing me down from this height!?”

It was nonsense. Even if he did strike the ground after his fall, it would only last an instant.

He could not feel pain in an instant and the great fall would crush his body within the chain, allowing him to almost entirely regenerate. Most of his body would be turned to bloody smoke and he would be freed from the chain.

He would have regenerated before his enemy could descend from the tower.

That meant he only needed to leave before she reached the surface. The time had come and there was no point in redoing the battle on the surface now that they had both seen what the other had to offer.

His enemy had essentially helped him leave, so...

“Ha haaaaa!”

He laughed and laughed and then realized his vision was blurring.

He did not know why that was, but he did reach a certain conclusion in his heart.

...It was no use!

In the end, it had been no use. He had managed to achieve something close to perfection in a female form, but that body contained none of the pain one needed to be human.

He was only a doll. He had a human form, but he was not human. And...

...It was no use.

As he began to fall, something left his feminine eyes and spilled down his feminine cheek. However, that overflowing substance and all else lost to the speed of his fall and scattered in the wind.

He saw the color red spreading out from the tower.

It was blood. The bloody smoke was spreading out into the air as if to embrace him and soothe him. It seemed to burst from the fissure of blossoming light in the tower and it pursued him.

In that instant, he saw a light. Below the cloudy night sky, a light suddenly jumped out from the tower.

Someone broke through the bloody smoke, scattering it, and chased after him.

He saw silver hair glowing in the pale light rising from the surface and he saw who had leaped down toward him while turned to the side to slip past him.

“The silver wolf!?”

The silver wolf jumped quickly into the night sky. She held a chain tied to one of the ring’s corner posts beyond the gaping hole in the tower.

“Toh.”

As soon as she passed Rudolf II, she pulled on the chain.

She moved back toward the tower with great force. She then let go of the

chain, never slowing even as she threw herself into empty space.

“...!”

The straight line attack knocked Rudolf II back toward the tower.

She used a longsword. The thick blade stabbed into the back of his head from the neck and came out between the eyes.

It pierced the medulla oblongata, severed the nerves, and caused an instantaneous tremble in his body.

Mitotsudaira maintained her momentum as she charged toward the tower, carrying Rudolf II with her.

But after recovering, Rudolf II smiled.

“You fool! The break in the tower is up above! Are you going to fall with me!?”

And...

“That instantaneous attack isn’t going to hurt me!”

Mitotsudaira did not care.

She had no intention of returning to the tower through the broken wall. She was trying to use her diagonal trajectory to collide with the metal tower. And she would use the process that followed to achieve her true goal.

“I will provide you with pain!”

First, she pulled two chain fragments from her pocket and stuck them in her ears.

They were earplugs.

After cutting off the surrounding noise, the silver wolf crashed into the tower’s wall with the sword still piercing through Rudolf II.

As soon as her parabolic course along the wall hit that wall, she pulled the sword from him. But the instant that wound began to fill in, she kicked him against the wall to flip him upside down.

“This is the spot!!”

She followed the sensation of the previous wound to stab the blade back in at a sharp angle.

She pierced his medulla oblongata.

At the same time, her feet landed on the wall.

She stood on that wall with the sword sticking straight toward it.

Then came the instant in which Rudolf II's upside down body trembled from his nerves being severed.

“———”

That was when Mitotsudaira stuck the tip of the sword against the metal wall.

“...!!”

As the sword tip scraped against the wall at maximum speed, she ran vertically down the five hundred meters.

An intense metallic sound screeched through an area outside of Magdeburg.

The persistently swelling metallic scraping played the tall tower like the string of an instrument.

Those watching the tower from below covered their ears.

“...!?”

They could not even hear their own voices and the idiot spread his fingers and held them out as if surrounding two spheres.

“...!?”

When all the others glared at him, he fell to his knees.

Meanwhile, Naito trembled.

...Wow.

The sound was beginning to trace along her feathers. It both tickled and itched.

...I know what this is.

Oriotorai had done it really loudly during class the other day.

...It's like nails on a chalkboard!

Mitotsudaira continued her downward run with sparks and scraping following behind her.

She was oriented perpendicular to the ground, so the surface was located directly ahead.

It was a five hundred meter distance.

She held the longsword's hilt and the blade was stabbed through the upside down M.H.R.R. Emperor.

That enemy had yet to recover. When it had lasted an instant, the sensation had not felt like pain, but...

...What if I drag it out!?

The swelling bitter noise came from the space between the wall and the sword pressed against it. She had earplugs made from the broken chain, but...

"How about this!?"

Rudolf II fluttered skyward from halfway down the sword stabbed horizontally through the back of his head.

And then he seemed to lose control of his body.

"Ah."

She faintly heard a voice, Rudolf II's voice. Beyond the sparks and surging noise, his voice rose countless times, was cut off, and occasionally trembled.

"Ah! Ahhhh! Abh...ra...aaaa....ra! Ra! Brrraaaaa!!"

Each time he spoke, his body raged. He was only a torso and head with no limbs, but he would flail around and transform into something else.

However, that transformation was broken. He would gain a woman's head with a man's torso, the left side would not match the right, half of his face would be something else, and something like tears scattered from him.

“Ahhhh...kaaaah!!”

His tongue extended from his mouth like a snake and his body shook again and again like a fish.

He could not control it.

It did not matter what he intended or what he thought. The sword was pumping metal vibrations directly into the nerves that controlled his entire body. The foundation of every single nerve was being torn at from within rather than without.

It filled him with pain.

The method was simple. His divine protection regeneration had only let him feel it for an instant, so she had made sure it would continue.

His divine protection was automatic and had a number of resistance patterns built in. The pain of severed nerves should have been instantly shut down and so would anything that sent constant pain to his nerves.

Anything perceived as pain would be shut out, so he could feel no pain.

...But what if something not perceived as pain is amplified and kept constant?

Rudolf II had no sense of pain, but his mind still controlled his body and his heart and other organs were autonomously controlled. That meant his nerves had to be functioning. Those nerves could not receive any external pain, but they would actively respond to anything from within. That was how he lacked a sense of pain.

In that case, if a vibration was created inside his nerves, he would receive it as an active pain.

His body was out of control, but not because of any external force. The vibration within his nerves was causing him to shake his own body.

He would be unable to move as he wished and he would feel a vague surprise and trembling.

...Altogether it creates a feeling that makes him want to call out for help!

His divine protection would likely shut out an electrical or spell attack. This only

worked by stabbing him through with a blade and extending the instantaneous tremble with a vibration much greater than mere sound.

His muscles shook on their own and writhed about uncontrollably.

“Ahhhh!”

His entire body undulated, his eyes opened wide, and his tongue stuck out into the air.

“Ahhhh...ra...aaaaahhhhh!!”

He was crying. He was feeling something that made him want to tell her to stop and to forgive him. Faced with his raging body, he seemed to want to reject everything.

He looked like a child throwing a tantrum at himself.

“———”

But Mitotsudaira sped up.

Mitotsudaira ran down the tower wall with the night’s sky washing over her.

She played the five hundred meter metal string with her sword pick.

She continued on.

She shot her own body toward the ground below.

Once, twice, thrice, she added a quick burst of speed.

With each acceleration, Rudolf II’s body hopped up. He would contract and extend, bend and straighten, and transform into more and more different forms. He was searching for the optimum solution.

He could no longer control his body. His mind had to be in a scorching state, but his divine protection was still trying to protect him. That transforming protection sought the optimum form for the damage he was taking. A few times, he swelled up and burst before rapidly narrowing and twisting back down.

“———!”

But he never found a fixed form. His body would change, rearrange, come

apart, and constantly transform.

...But there won't be an optimum!

After all...

...This vibration was never expected!

When his own body was shaking him from the inside, there was nothing his divine protection could do. Unless he eliminated himself, this situation would never be resolved.

And Mitotsudaira had a thought about the tearfully raging M.H.R.R. Emperor.

...I think your parents must have cared for you quite a bit.

They may never have struck him and they may have treated him differently from others, but the divine protection they had given him did not give up trying to save him even as he was being harmed by himself.

With each step another attack, she ran and she swung her body forward and downward.

At the three hundred meter mark, the blade tip broke.

She pressed further down and the broken blade produced an even nicer sound than before *...Oh, dear.*

If I had known it would sound this nice, I would have done this sooner.

The chain-wrapped mass of flesh hopped even more spectacularly, but that was also a representation of the sound. She had taken music classes in Musashi, but she quite liked them and had good grades in them. Since her voice was on the higher end, she was often paired with Tomo and her powerful voice, but she had never expected to come across such a nice instrument here.

Each time she accelerated, the sound grew even nicer, so she decided to accelerate.

“Lrr...”

Her voice escaped to join the sound. It was the growling of a wolf.

“Lrr... Lrr...garr...”

That growling was the origin of the word Loup-Garou.

The silver wolf began to sing as she played her instrument below the night sky.

The wonderful sound carried through the night.

“Lrr...rrr...rrr...”

The swelling, leaping sound coincided with her actions. Whenever she accelerated, it would cry out and sparks would decorate the air.

She was moving.

And then she saw the view from the tower.

She saw villages, forests, rivers running through them, and...

...That's Magdeburg!

To the north, a large city was thickly besieged. She saw many lights in the city, countless fires flickered outside its walls, and shadows of ships could be seen in the sky.

Her classmates were there and the Musashi would soon be returning there.

That is where we will be going, she thought.

“Lrrooo...”

The voice that escaped her throat no longer had the breaks that followed a nice tempo. This came from a wolf's instincts to call its packmates.

“Lrooo...oo...oo...ooo...”

Her throat trembled as she released that joyous call.

She gave another quick burst of additional speed as the howl shook her entire body.

Her movements left even the wind behind now. She passed the two hundred meter mark, but she started making repeated jumps forward and downward.

She passed the one hundred meter mark almost immediately, covered half of that, and found she could only see the ground.

At that point, Rudolf II's body gave an extra strong shake.

However, this was not the uncontrolled movement brought on by the vibration. His entire body shook as if bringing itself into order and regaining control.

This was the final resistance of the emperor's divine protection as it tried to escape this.

Mitotsudaira responded to Rudolf II's resistance by letting go of the sword.

She used both hands to thrust the sword forward and downward.

For just a moment, the sword scraped itself against the wall as if taking autonomous control, but that did not last long. It soon decelerated and Rudolf II began to regain control.

Mitotsudaira gave a jump, but she was no longer running vertically down the wall. She turned her head downward as if diving down the wall.

She continued onward.

She extended and released her body to make a great downward leap, but she immediately shrank down in midair, rotated around, and positioned her feet toward the ground.

Her feet were targeting the decelerated sword. Specifically, the side of the blade.

"You did this to me earlier, didn't you?"

She hit the blade with the same technique Rudolf II had used before: a dropkick.

Given even more momentum than before, the longsword scraped into the wall and let loose a scream that seemed to tear into the air.

Rudolf II's body lost complete control.

This sudden blast after the moment of recovery was just too much for him to bear.

"...!!"

Mitotsudaira saw him bite the tongue that had extended to give a cry of

rejection And he had taken a female form befitting that suicidal action.

“Are you admitting you’re feeling pain!?”

He was experiencing something worse than death. That was what it meant.

“An emperor must not kill himself!!”

She forcefully accelerated the sword stabbing through him so it moved downward.

His head was split in half from the medulla oblongata, including the tongue he was trying to bite.

The sword came free.

The halved head began to paste back together, starting from the neck, but Mitotsudaira did not stop there.

She grabbed the falling sword’s hilt and swung it straight upwards.

The blade sliced him in two, from his recovered head to his crotch.

“I will save your life!!”

Mitotsudaira sliced the emperor in two with enough force to cut through the chain as well.

She tossed him away.

His two halves were quickly thrown apart where they slammed into the ground and burst. But as soon as the flesh exploded, the emperor’s divine protection kicked in.

Rudolf II’s entire body turned to the regenerating bloody spray.

The sword shattered and the chain broke, but...

“—————”

With the flying bloody spray in the background, the silver wolf kicked off the wall in a leap.

She rotated around and landed with the tower behind her.

All of the bloody smoke gathered together and whipped up the wind.

At the same time, the surrounding forest exploded. The birds and beasts frozen in fear of all the noise and the wolf's howling had begun to move once the great reverberation vanished.

An overflowing number of birds flew up toward the cloudy sky.

While listening to the countless flapping sounds, animal cries, and distant howling from the forest and while sensing the spiraling wind of regeneration on her skin, Mitotsudaira slowly lowered her arms and cried out.

“Victory!”

Mitotsudaira took a breath. Around her, a large whirlwind carried a dark bloody mist through the night, but the moisture did not reach her and she could not smell it. Rudolf II was likely in the process of regaining his form.

She also heard some footsteps from a short distance away. They came from the two women who had been at the tower's entrance.

“Master Rudolf!”

When she heard the tone of their calling voices, Mitotsudaira decided to leave Rudolf II to them.

But there was one thing she had to do first.

...Here it is.

A memo on parchment had fallen among the scraps of uniform found between the chain and sword on the torn ground.

That memo was from Carlos I, chancellor of M.H.R.R. from two generations ago.

Mitotsudaira picked it up.

“...?”

She saw a naked form lying on the grassy ground.

It was Rudolf II, but...

...A girl?

This was not the male form she had first seen. It resembled the form he had completed during their battle, but it was still different. The girl lying unconscious there looked a little softer and a little less solid.

Had the emperor's divine protection provided him with the optimal female form during the battle?

Or...

"Was he really a woman...but was forced to take a male form at a young age to become emperor?"

I'm reading too much into this, she thought. *But*, she also thought.

"—————"

Well, it doesn't really matter, she concluded with a shake of the head. He would be the one to decide what form he took from here on.

He had confirmed that he could feel pain and had therefore become a child of man.

So...

...I'm sure he'll choose the form he actually wants and not one he feels forced into.

As a knight, she bowed toward the sleeping emperor.

The two women ran past her.

"Master Rudolf!"

She turned her back on their voices and faced forward.

The others were there.

Mitotsudaira looked to the others as if she had not seen them in a long while.

One of them rushed forward.

"My king."

She smiled at him as he scratched his head, looked directly at her, and approached.

Suddenly, she remembered slamming him into the wall during the battle.

“You really saved me?”

“Why was that a question?”

Oh, that’s right, she thought. While wondering how to explain, she took a step forward to hand him the memo. And as she got closer, a familiar scent reached her nose.

“...”

She fell to her knees and her mind went dark.

Her tension left her and she passed out.

Asama sighed after receiving word via Magdeburg’s M.H.R.R. Protestants.

She faced forward and spoke into the plaza in front of the cathedral.

“A night bird spirit just delivered a letter from outside the city. Apparently... um, Toori-kun and the others have acquired Carlos I’s memo.”

She was speaking to Masazumi who sat next to her on one of the plaza’s benches.

Vice President: “Sounds like they did a good job. Was that Mitotsudaira’s doing?”

Asama: “According to Naito, Mito tore Rudolf II to pieces in a locked room, jumped humming from a great height, sliced him in two, turned him to mincemeat, and had him reincarnated as a beautiful girl.”

Mal-Ga: “Yeah, that’ll happen.”

Righteousness: “Eh?”

They were sharing their communications with the Germans, so Asama looked forward and saw them frowning to each other. The silver god of war and Anne were silently looking her way from the center of the plaza. Asama decided to

ignore all of them and she had something more to say.

Asama: “It seems Rudolf II has ‘retreated’ along with his bodyguards. After Toori-kun received the memo from Mito, he gave it to the Reine des Garous, so their mission from Hexagone Française is complete. They are apparently headed this way, but...”

Vice President: “Hexagone Française is set to arrive at 7:30, but that isn’t long since it’s already a quarter after. It may be best for them to stay put in that southern region.”

Wise Sister: “What if they get ‘protected’ while they take their time there? And you know what else? We’re in trouble, too. Even if Hexagone Française is on the way to give her paramour a beating, a woman mustn’t neglect her own protection. ...Are there anti-air defenses set up around the city? Can you tell us, nerd?”

Novice: “I had that checked a moment ago. An anti-air and anti-ground defensive barrier are set up around the cathedral. It covers the city walls with a focus on the river side. The output devices have copies of the Testament loaded at each crucial point, so they should be fairly obvious. ...I’d say it can stop something of around Dragon-class. Instead of reflecting the damage, it redirects it.”

Mal-Ga: “That’s quite a bit of power. Is that because the cathedral contains the bodies of Otto I and his wife?”

Asama looked to the cathedral. Its two spires had the roof removed and Testament copies were loaded into the cone shape.

...There’s an umbrella of ether above.

She could see it quite well with Konoha, her prosthetic left eye. It redirected rather than reflecting, so the fluid light flowed down from the center of the umbrella.

Ones shaped like vertical walls were located around the outer edges of the city, but...

Mal-Ga: “That will work well against big targets, but the flow will stall wherever it’s hit, won’t it? Do they have wiper spells to keep objects from sitting

on them and do the wall ones harden instantaneously?”

Novice: “They do in the most important spots. However, the hardening walls leave gaps, so they’re supported by the front and back of the redirecting waterfalls. I expect they’ll hold up to any projectiles.”

“So,” he continued.

Novice: “The only question is how M.H.R.R. will react to Hexagone Française’s entrance.”

...It’s like a negotiation of power.

Asama gave a mental nod.

This was a form of negotiation between two powerful nations with their obligations and futures on the line. They hesitated over, relied on, used, and enforced the guidelines of the Testament descriptions.

“Hm? What is it, Asama? Why are you squeezing your boobs between your arms? Do you want me to shove my hand in between!? Do you!? You do, don’t you!?”

She ignored the wiggling crazy person. Also, the three hundred crossdressers on the other end of the park were doing curls with metal dumbbells and shouting, “We’re not going to let you win! Bigger! We need bigger busts!” Although she was fairly sure that was strengthening their pecs, not increasing their bust size.

At any rate, she heard a rumbling of the air far to the west and Tomoe turned in that direction.

“So the Hexagone Française fleet has exited stealth mode to let us know they’re approaching.”

Yes, thought Asama with a sigh of relief.

“...?”

She then thought she heard a sound.

Asama glanced in the direction of the sound.

It was to the southwest.

...Did I just hear something like a wave in the distance?

She heard it again.

“———”

It was definitely from the southwest. As she looked more closely in that direction, Tomoe reacted first and the silver god of war named Palais-Cardinal raised its head. Tomoe frowned.

“Hashiba’s strategist is Takenaka, isn’t it? That was an oddly quick decision.”

Before Tomoe had even finished speaking, the sound reached them more clearly.

Countless overlapping metallic sounds combined into something resembling a wave. It sounded like it was all welling up from the ground.

“To the east!”

The eastern earth had moved on the Elbe’s opposite bank. Or so it seemed.

In reality, the siege troops had moved all at once.

They were moving south toward the bridge leading to Magdeburg’s south side. And they were not alone. The warriors to the north, south, and west were moving as well.

“———!!”

They raised their voices as one, created countless metallic sounds, and began to march.

As the earth rumbled, the cathedral’s stained glass and the shutters on the nearby houses shook.

The great noise roared and the movement of the thirty thousand warriors looked like the movement of the earth itself. They surrounded the city from every direction with no gaps and they created tremendous sound and motion.

Vice President: “Eh? Wait a second...”

Asama looked at the clock. The M.H.R.R. Catholics were supposed to attack at

eight o'clock, but...

“Wait! It’s still 7:20! Isn’t this forty minutes early!?”

Righteousness: “I don’t know what’s going on, but I’ll tell you what I can see from Righteousness’s shoulder.”

Yoshiyasu’s divine transmission described the source of the sound.

Righteousness: “The thirty thousand M.H.R.R. warriors surrounding Magdeburg are all preparing to attack. An assault unit of five thousand has already split away from the main group. They will probably rush in to combat range in ten minutes.”

The enemy was moving before the announced time. Asama trembled at that fact.

...W-wait a second. Um...

“It’s 7:20, right? Even if Hexagone Française arrives in ten minutes, the siege troops will be coming in at the same time, so...”

The M.H.R.R. Catholics would begin the Sack in the time it took for Hexagone Française to deploy their troops after arriving.

“If that happens, um, it should end up like this.”

Asama typed out what would happen and showed the others.

“It’s 7:20 right now, so...”

Ten minutes from now (7:30): Hexagone Française arrives in Magdeburg
Same time: M.H.R.R Catholics begin Sack of Magdeburg.

Twenty-five minutes from now (7:45): Hexagone Française deploys their troops and attacks siege troops?

Same time: M.H.R.R. Catholics complete Sack of Magdeburg.

“As things stand, Hexagone Française won’t make it in time!”

Neshinbara then spoke.

Novice: “The siege troops’ five thousand man assault unit contains one thousand using high-speed mobile shells. Given the state of modern high-speed

battles, they will probably conquer a city the size of Magdeburg in fifteen minutes, even if you add in the time it takes to cross the city walls.”

If the Sack was beginning in ten minutes, that was a total of twenty-five minutes away.

The Sack would be over by the time Hexagone Française attacked.

“Wh-what is going on!? Why is the enemy starting earlier than their already early start!?”

Asama wondered if she was just too honest. This may have been how the negotiation known as war worked.

Everyone fell silent, but Adele finally typed out a message.

Flat Vassal: “Did they learn their reinforcements from K.P.A. Italia would make it?”

Novice: “Even if they did, there’s no need to start immediately and get themselves caught in a pincer movement between Magdeburg and Hexagone Française. But...what in the world is this? Do they think the early start will give us less time to prepare and weaken our pincer movement? Or is this a suicide attack focused on the overall benefit?”

They all exchanged a glance, but none of them had an answer.

However, Tomoe stood up and looked across all of them.

“Regardless, the battle is beginning. M.H.R.R’s thirty thousand siege troops are here early. That’s all we need to know. If it’s going to take Hexagone Française twenty-five minutes to attack...”

Then...

“We have to hold out until then somehow or another. ...We have ten minutes to prepare! Hurry! It’s time for the kind of resistance fight I love so much!!”

Chapter 73: Gatherers at the Besieged City

CHAPTER 73

"Gatherers at the Besieged City"



Is it a place where everyone gathers?
Or is it a ship that heads out to gather everyone?
Point Allocation (Sky)

Is it a place where everyone gathers?

Or is it a ship that heads out to gather everyone?

Point Allocation (Sky)

The M.H.R.R. Catholics had begun the Sack of Magdeburg even earlier than announced.

The Catholic Spell barrier “God Wishes for Silence” cut off all divine transmissions out of Magdeburg, so that fact arrived a few minutes late to the different factions in the surrounding areas.

Musashi was no exception, so by the time word arrived there, the siege troops had been on the move for four whole minutes.

The information was first relayed on to the student council and chancellor’s officers, but...

“Heidi, what does this mean? According to the series of smoke signals and lookouts in the Protestant cities, the M.H.R.R. Catholics have started to move at Magdeburg. And the Sack is going to begin in ten...no, now it would be five minutes?”

At the bottom of Musashino, the maintenance division had a section built on the upper floors of the engine division’s section. They worked on the god of war hangar, any parts of transport ships that were bought in, and repairs for any other equipment or machinery.

Naomasa was working with members of Satomi Academy’s maintenance division to repair Yoshiyori’s Yatsufusa and she was currently turned toward Heidi who was resting her elbow on Adele’s suspended mobile shell.

Mishina Hiro spoke up as she passed by.

“Oh, Vice Principal Yoshinao’s repairing that, so don’t touch it too much.”

“Judge, judge,” said Heidi while turning to face Naomasa. “How should I put it? ...Well, it looks like they’ve moved up their timetable yet again. As you said, it sounds like the Sack of Magdeburg is just about to begin.”

“Can’t we send Musashi out?”

Heidi was not the one to answer that. A sign frame appeared in between everyone there which displayed “Musashi” with Sakai waving in the background.

“Musashi” silenced the man by glaring over her shoulder, but she soon faced forward again.

“Naomasa-sama and Heidi-sama are there, correct? Over.”

“Do you need to contact the student council and chancellor’s officers about something? Should I also contact Urquiaga who’s helping Noriki and the others carry things?”

“Judge. We have received a new warning from the M.H.R.R. Catholics.”

Namely...

“If the Musashi cruises through M.H.R.R. territory, they will attack.”

Naomasa saw those around her exchanging glances.

Once they all turned her way, she asked the sign frame a question. *I’m really not cut out for this, so why do I get stuck being the mediator?* she wondered.

“So can’t we have ourselves towed there? They specified ‘cruising’ after all.”

“They seem to have determined that the power provided by towing qualifies as cruising. Over.”

“That ain’t good,” said Naomasa as she brushed a hand through her hair.

It would take eight hours to be towed to Magdeburg. There was no way they would make it in time for the Sack, but even that had been sealed off.

And that was why Heidi frowned and spoke.

“They’re intent on keeping the Musashi away from Magdeburg, aren’t they? Hashiba was the one that ordered the reorganization of the fleet in M.H.R.R. yesterday, so they must really want to complete the Sack of Magdeburg and have started eliminating any factors that could get in their way.”

Which meant...

“To put it another way, M.H.R.R. will complete the Sack of Magdeburg.”

“Hah. This merchant makes it sound like we could stop the Sack if we managed to get there.”

“Loading things up is a merchant’s greatest skill, be it hopes or merchandise.”

Heidi formed a composed smile and Naomasa was glad the girl was here, but...

“The M.H.R.R. Catholics and Hexagone Française are both being pretty bold here. They’re using their early starts and interference to fight over who takes the initiative.”

“They do both have a justification,” said a sudden voice.

It came from someone standing on Yatsufusa’s shoulder.

It was Yoshiyori who carried a heavy charm plug for running an ether engine. He looked down at them with the plug over his shoulder.

“Sorry for butting in, but Hexagone Française can claim they are there to take back Anne of Austria before the Sack and M.H.R.R. can claim that Hexagone Française might have interfered and so they began before Hexagone Française arrived to eliminate that risk. It will be a win for the M.H.R.R. Catholics as long as they can produce the results they want and their reinforcements from K.P.A. Italia are probably getting close.”

But Naomasa tilted her head.

“But Satomi Chancellor, those reinforcements won’t be there immediately. What if this early beginning gets them crushed before the reinforcements arrive?”

“I have an idea concerning that.”

A new figure had entered the sign frame displaying “Musashi” and Sakai.

It was Gin.

She bowed toward “Musashi” and Sakai before facing forward again.

She pulled up a diagram onto the sign frame.

It was a simple map centered on the city of Magdeburg on the western bank of the Elbe River which flowed south to north.

“After the confrontation with Hexagone Française at IZUMO yesterday, the fleet in the Magdeburg region was reorganized on Hashiba’s orders. The fleet is primarily made up of Kraken-class transport ships and they have been placed north of Magdeburg.”

As she spoke, silhouettes of the ships appeared on the map.

“There are eighteen transport ships in all. Six are equipped for attack and they are arranged like this.”

“You can get to the point anytime.”

Gin narrowed her eyes at Naomasa’s comment, but her lips then uttered “the point”.

“Magdeburg will fall quickly. Most likely, the first ten minutes of the battle will be crucial.”

“How will they do it?”

“Judge. Hashiba’s strategy will be both a warning and a show of force to Hexagone Française as they arrive after the fact. When the Mouri clan falls to Hashiba, do you know how their castle is said to be defeated?”

Gin gave the answer as if it were a truly uninteresting phrase.

“By flooding it.”

As he left the forest atop a hill overlooking northern Magdeburg, Tenzou saw what the enemy intended to do.

“Are they damming the Elbe River with the transport ships!?”

The crossdresser stepped up next to him and took the same pose.

“Are they damming the Elbe River with the transport ships!?”

“Ah! Why does that piss me off so much!?”

Tenzou checked on Magdeburg while doing his best to ignore the idiot who twisted his lips and body to look up at him from below.

Low in the night sky, there was movement downstream on the Elbe River and

thus north of Magdeburg. Eight large transport ships had split into two rows, formed an arc, and were sinking down toward the river surface. The eight ships were almost touching, so when the front two touched the water and began to rock, those behind them helped support them.

When they struck the water, it produced the noise of crashing waves which almost sounded like a large breath being inhaled. Naito walked up behind the two boys and held up a telescope Magie Figur like a monocle.

“Ohh, that doesn’t look good. I know this area. The land around Magdeburg is lower than the surrounding region and the city’s really close to the river because of all the river trading they do. So if it’s dammed up, the city will be flooded, starting with the side by the river. And the city walls won’t allow the water to escape.”

“I see.” Tenzou nodded and turned to Mary. “I assume Magdeburg is prepared to place defensive wall spells on the river side of the city, but... Mary-dono? What would happen with defensive spell walls in a case like this?”

“Judge. The pressure of the excess water will constantly press against the defensive spell barriers along the river. Those spell barriers are made to concentrate their power when something hits them, but...”

As she spoke, the transport ship dam reached Magdeburg’s outer wall.

The eight submerged ships sprayed water up from the vents on their decks to inform the night that they had finished destroying themselves.

Next to Tenzou, Mary frowned at the movement of the eight ships.

“It looks like they positioned them after checking on the bumps and rocks of the river bottom. They’re making sure the water will escape towards Magdeburg while also making sure the ships aren’t washed away. But...most of the city’s defensive walls are being used to keep the water out. The water pressure will probably reach critical levels in about ten minutes and wouldn’t the flooding begin from the ground?”

“Testament,” agreed the Reine des Garous.

She looked to the western sky where the Hexagone Française fleet split the clouds and approached, but based on its speed...

“It will take another twelve minutes before they arrive and lower their troops. I expect they will have each individual unit rush in as soon as they can to shorten that time, but they still won’t quite make it in time for the beginning of the Sack and the flooding. Still, I expect Magdeburg will take up a defense that takes advantage of the flooding.”

“So this battle is going to be a fight against time.”

“Testament. That is why I will take this chance to ask all of you something.”

“What is it?” asked Tenzou.

The Reine des Garous glanced at her daughter who slept on Excalibur as it floated behind Mary.

“With the Musashi’s size, defenses, and transportation ability, it would be able to seize air superiority here and also evacuate the people, goods, and materials. However, M.H.R.R. sent out a warning before they took control of the divine transmissions.”

That meant the Musashi could not go there, but...

“Do you think the Musashi will come here regardless?”

The Reine des Garous faced forward, toward her daughter’s king.

The crossdresser tilted his head.

“Eh? It’s the Musashi. Of course it’s coming.”

He seemed to be asking why she even needed to ask and she realized that she was briefly confused by that attitude, but...

...That’s right.

Her daughter and the others had come here to save that boy and they were here now, so...

“That’s right. Of course it’s coming.”

A small smile escaped onto her lips and she pointed to Magdeburg.

“Look.”

After seeing them all turn in that direction, she opened her mouth.

“It’s time I told you the route you can take to Magdeburg.”

“Are you listening?” asked the Reine des Garous. “If the Musashi comes to Magdeburg, the M.H.R.R. Catholic fleet will begin to move in order to punish Musashi for ignoring their warning. That will be between the M.H.R.R. Catholics and Musashi, so the Hexagone Française fleet will not be able to help. That means the Musashi can’t stay in Magdeburg.”

“You mean we can no longer have the Musashi pick us up in some safe place?”

“Testament. The warriors arriving from K.P.A. Italia will probably help attack the Musashi. After helping save Magdeburg, the Musashi won’t have time to stop by anywhere else. Hurrying to Qing-Takeda will be their best bet. And that means you all need to enter Magdeburg or somewhere else where you can reach the Musashi.”

The Reine des Garous took a breath and pointed in front of Magdeburg.

“One possible route is to the west.”

“The west?” asked Tenzou. “Won’t that be an area of intense fighting?”

“Don’t worry,” she began while pointing at the M.H.R.R. formation. “We are currently to the southwest of Magdeburg. From here, it looks like the M.H.R.R. Catholics have a five thousand man assault unit to the south as well as twenty-five thousand warriors waiting for Hexagone Française to the west.”

But...

“The twenty-five thousand western siege troops will have to move further west to intercept Hexagone Française. They need as much space as possible so they can gradually fall back in their defensive battle against Hexagone Française and its god of war unit. So you head in on the west. You can slip behind those twenty-five thousand when they move forward. You will probably have to make your way through their formation, but their camps should be abandoned and you can slip through the empty areas.”

“We are in your debt.”

The ninja bowed but then looked toward the English princess.

The Reine des Garous's daughter was sleeping on Excalibur behind the girl.

The daughter's breathing had already calmed down and her wounds had healed to the point of only containing some faint heat. She was only sleeping as an adjustment to absorb what she had gained during her battle.

The Reine des Garous gave a quick bow to the English princess.

"Thank you for healing my daughter."

"I only did what anyone would have. But..."

"Testament. It isn't easy carrying her around, is it? I will take her until she wakes up. The rest of you head on to Magdeburg."

"Ahh," said the crossdresser while scratching his head. "Are you sure you'll actually give her back?"

"I will. I have something to discuss with her, so it will be after that. Heh heh. It's been a while since we've had a nice mother-daughter chat."

She placed a hand on her cheek and smiled.

"The rest of you can get going. The Musashi is coming, isn't it?"

"The only remaining problem is how to get to Magdeburg."

Naomasa brushed a hand through her hair again and sighed in her heart.

...Oh, it's because I sum things up like this that I end up as the mediator.

That belated realization filled her heart with a kind of admiration.

At any rate, she asked Heidi a question.

"Heidi, since you're here, I take it you have some business here."

"Judge. I have some business with this person. Horizon and I split up to search for them."

Heidi kicked Adele's mobile shell, which indicated a certain individual.

...Adele? No, that isn't it.

“The Musashi King!?”

As soon as Naomasa said that, two people stepped in through the maintenance hangar’s entrance. The first wore a work uniform.

“Did we just hear you call for us!?”

It was Musashi King Yoshinao and behind him was Horizon.

“Oh!” Heidi looked up and waved to Horizon. “So he really was up there on Musashino’s bridge!”

“Judge. Vice Principal Yoshinao had the same idea we did. Now, Vice Principal Yoshinao, please use this chance to show off.”

“Judge.” Yoshinao nodded and looked to the sign frame showing “Musashi” and Sakai. “We will be sending the Musashi to Magdeburg. Is that acceptable?”

“Musashi King, M.H.R.R. has banned us from cruising through their territory. Over.”

“That’s right,” said Naomasa as she and the others looked to Yoshinao, but the man crossed his arms and proudly puffed out his chest.

“There is a single way of arriving in Magdeburg without cruising through M.H.R.R. territory. Of course, we are clearly in a bit of a hurry, but...”

He looked to “Musashi” in the sign frame.

“ ‘Musashi’-kun, how long will it take to reach Magdeburg using gravitational cruising at full power?”

“Judge. About ten minutes. However, acceleration and stopping will add to the time,” she replied. “And the M.H.R.R. Catholics have attack ships waiting north of Magdeburg. If we enter stealth cruising to slip past them...”

“That will not be necessary,” declared Yoshinao with a nod. “The Musashi will arrive in Magdeburg in just under ten minutes.”

“———”

Speechless, Naomasa watched as Yoshinao raised his eyebrows in a smile.

“Do you have any questions?”

“Well...yes. After all...”

Naomasa just about said “that’s impossible”, but...

“It is possible. We just had ‘Musashino’-kun and Mukai-kun verify it.”

With that said, Yoshinao opened a sign frame of his own and turned it toward them.

“What do you think?” he asked while holding up the plan.

Hiro ran over and was the first to read it. After checking through it, she frowned.

“...Eh!? Wait... This is actually possible!?”

“It is,” confirmed the Musashi King without losing his smile.

He then looked to Naomasa.

“Now, don’t you want to try out this crazy idea of ours!?”

Study

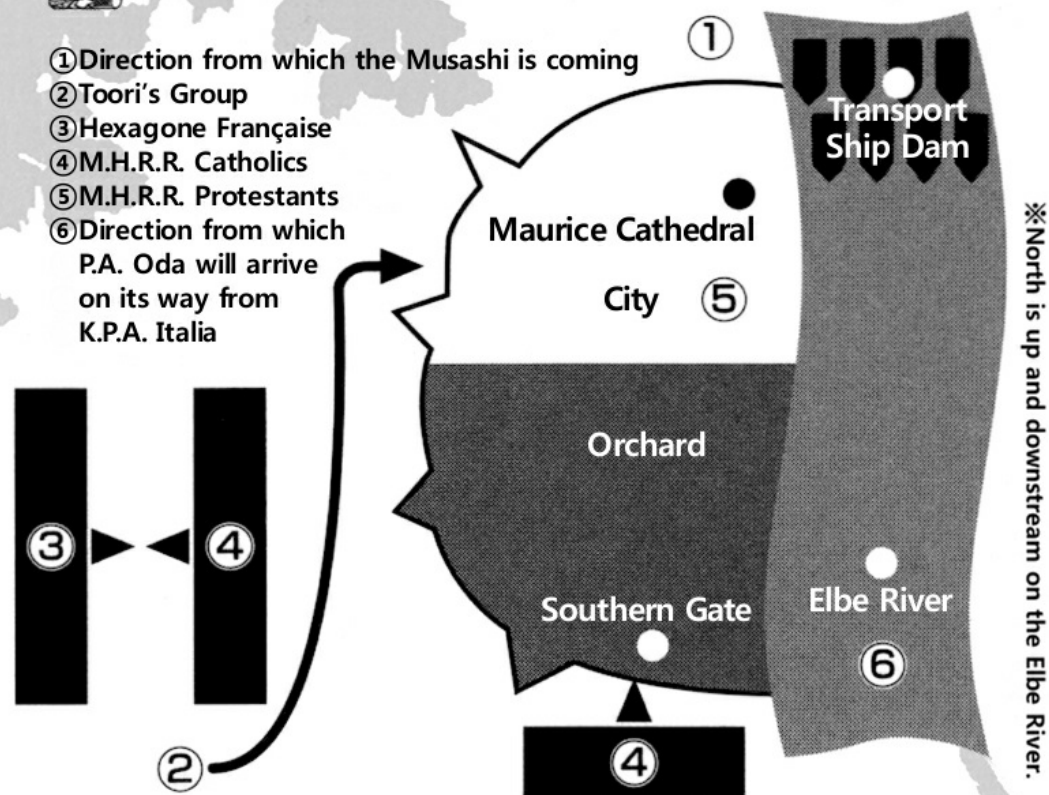
●Magdeburg Battlefield Diagram●



"Sis! Sis! Can you show me the situation and the schedule so we can help clear up the traffic jam!?"



"Heh heh heh. Schedule brother, this probably sums it up well enough."



"Anyway, the overall schedule is as you see down here. The early start has made a lot of it overlap and remember that it's 7:25 right now."

Five minutes later (7:30)	: M.H.R.R. Catholics begin the Sack.
Same Time	: Hexagone Française arrives, begins deploying troops and has each unit attack once it is ready.
Ten minutes later (7:35)	: Flooding of Magdeburg begins (but the walls will defend against it).
Same Time	: The Musashi arrives at Magdeburg?
Twenty minutes later (7:45)	: M.H.R.R. Catholics complete the Sack.
Same Time	: Flooding of Magdeburg intensifies (defended by the walls?).
Same Time	: Hexagone Française finishes deploying troops and attacks.



"It should end after twenty minutes and the Musashi's arrival time is a big question."



"Ahh, I guess I need to hurry too."



"It sounds like you might be the cause of the traffic jam."

Magdeburg Battlefield Diagram

Toori: Sis! Sis! Can you show me the situation and the schedule so we can help clear up the traffic jam!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Schedule brother, this probably sums it up well enough.

1. Direction from which the Musashi is coming
2. Toori's Group
3. Hexagone Française
4. M.H.R.R. Catholics
5. M.H.R.R. Protestants
6. Direction from which P.A. Oda will arrive on its way from K.P.A. Italia

Right of 1: Transport Ship Dam

Above 5: Maurice Cathedral

Left of 5: City

Below 5: Orchard

Above 4: Southern Gate

Above 6: Elbe River

Far right: North is up and downstream on the Elbe River.

Kimi: Anyway, the overall schedule is as you see down here. The early start has made a lot of it overlap and remember that it's 7:25 right now.

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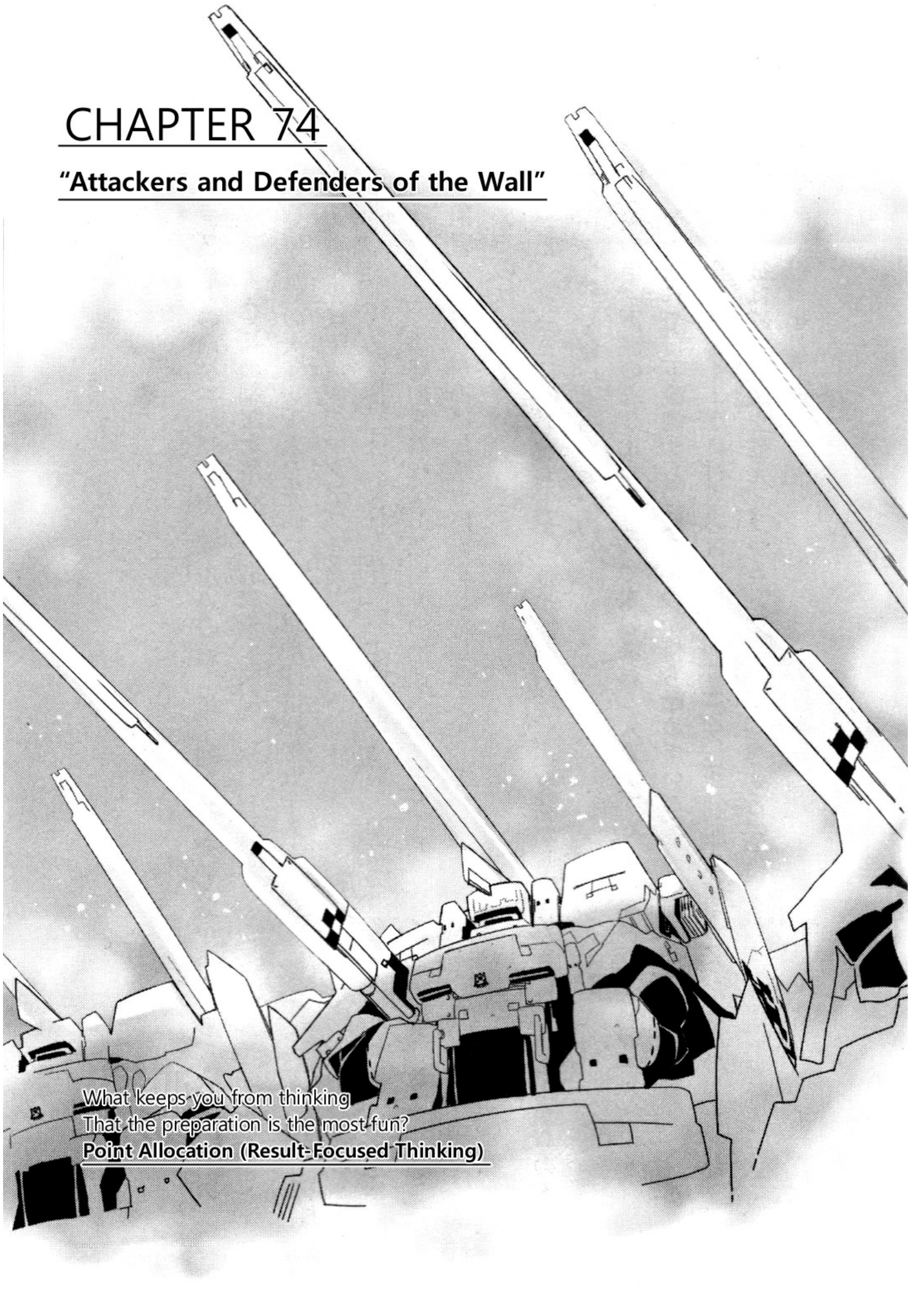
Toori: Ahh, I guess I need to hurry too.

Kimi: It sounds like you might be the cause of the traffic jam.

Chapter 74: Attackers and Defenders of the Wall

CHAPTER 74

"Attackers and Defenders of the Wall"



What keeps you from thinking
That the preparation is the most fun?
Point Allocation (Result-Focused Thinking)

What keeps you from thinking

That the preparation is the most fun?

Point Allocation (Result-Focused Thinking)

People formed ranks and travelled along the path south of Magdeburg and upstream of the Elbe River. The warriors wore a mix of M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda uniforms.

The five thousand man assault unit kept a battalion of one thousand high-speed mobile shells in the lead.

They were marching for the downstream side of Magdeburg.

The mobile shells in the lead were all from the Holy Knights' Steel Association brand. The unique white high-speed style shells had rounded corners and the Klassisch Kunst acceleration spell of their rear accelerators were idling.

Their footsteps rang loud and their raised guns and spears dully glowed.

The sky was covered in clouds.

Due to the dark clouds rising from K.P.A. Italia in the south, clouds had begun to cover M.H.R.R. from the south as evening had turned to night.

The great noise of raging water filled the darkness from downstream the dammed river. The mobile shells were upstream, but the Elbe's width was fluctuating and a few waves were beginning to arrive from downstream.

The one who seemed to guide them all was a demonic man wearing a black M.H.R.R. uniform.

He was Katsuie. With Narimasa alongside him, he raised his deep voice as he ran.

"Shuuuuut the hell uuuuuup!"

His voice was loud enough to be heard over the raging river that was beginning to flow backwards. The following men repeated his cry.

"Shuuuuut the hell uuuuuup!"

The sunglasses-wearing man glared over at the demonic man running next to him.

“God, you’re annoying.”

The following men repeated him as well.

“God, you’re annoyiiiiing!”

“Narimasa, you son of a bitch!!”

“Narimasa, you son of a biiiiitch!!”

“Shut up, Shibata! And shut up, the rest of you! Anyway, um, everyone stop!”

After a mixture of “Shaja!” and “Testament!”, the land warriors stopped their advance and lined up in step.

“Now, then!”

Katsuie turned his back on Magdeburg to face the others. The raging Elbe was to his left, Magdeburg’s south gate was far behind him, and he loudly clapped his hands once.

Next to him, Narimasa spread his knees, crouched down, and raised a hand toward the others.

“Okay, just stay where you are. Let’s see... this annoying upperclassman is going to tell you a bunch of stuff, so listen or whatever.”

“Dammit, don’t you have any motivation at all!? Look!”

Katsuie opened a large *insha kotob* for them all to see.

“Lady Oichi sent me this worried divine mail! It says, ‘Master Katsuie and everyone else, please do your very best so none of you get hurt’! Isn’t she a skilled writer!?”

“Not in the slightest! Isn’t that the hiragana font the Protestants made!?”

“What!? It only looked like crap when you used it because it was your writing! You just don’t get it! Besides, she was even kind enough to mention all of you small fries as ‘everyone else’!”

“Are you picking a fight with the rest of us? ...And don’t all of you get all teary-eyed over it!”

“Oh?” Katsuie twisted around and looked down at Narimasa. “It looks like you only count as ‘everyone else’ to Lady Oichi. Doesn’t it, Naru Naruuuu?”

“G-god, you are the worst superior imaginable!”

“What’s wrong with this?” Katsuie placed a sheathed Kamewari over his shoulder, turned back to the others, and continued. “I learned a lot about the river bottom from fishing around here and when I gave Hashiba that information, I got this plan back. ...If we fail here, it’ll count as Hashiba’s failure.”

“You just made it clear who wants to look out for Hashiba the most, you know?”

“The boss, right? And anyway, you worry about her too, don’t you?”

“She can push herself too hard.”

The others nodded in agreement with Narimasa, so Katsuie nodded back.

“Do this right, everyone. ...This is the plan desperately thought up by the person I have to be defeated by eventually. If we can’t complete this, it’ll mean the struggle between Hashiba and me is only on that level.”

He then pointed Kamewari behind him where the water was beginning to press up against Magdeburg’s outer wall. The metallic sounds of the dam ships bumping into each other sounded like distant thunder, but he commented on that noise.

“The dam sure is shaking. ...Anyway, Magdeburg has a height difference from its upstream end to its downstream end. In another ten minutes, the downstream end will be five meters deep, but by then, the defensive barrier will have reached its limit and been destroyed thanks to the water and a few other tricks of ours. We’ll use that to conquer the inside of the city, but Hexagone Française will arrive afterwards. To make sure we can actually leave, our limit is about fifteen minutes, so make sure you clean up the inside in that time.”

“What? Didn’t you say we could break the wall in five minutes back at the earlier meeting? Did you lower the average time because you aren’t confident

we can do it?”

“Don’t be stupid. They’ve started working against us.” Katsuie clicked his tongue. “One of them has good instincts. Probably Musashi’s secretary. They took the defense spell systems set up along the river bank and moved them to the second story of some nearby houses. They alternatively put them either high or low. Do you get what that means?”

“Yeah. Instead of sitting in a straight line, it crisscrosses. It’s weaker to attacks from the side, but it has some flexibility to a direct push.”

“Oh, is that how it works? ...Hey, everyone, if you cram your head full of little facts like this small fry, you’ll never move up in the world. You need to live in the big picture like me.”

“D-damn you!”

“Shut up.” Katsuie waved a hand dismissively. “This means they’re taking this seriously and that sounds good to me. Right!?”

Another mixture of “shaja” and “testament” reached him.

Their responses brought a smile to the corner of his mouth.

“That’s what I like to hear,” he commented. “Okay! Don’t any of you forget that Lady Oichi was worried for you!”

Are you listening?

“Don’t waste your life! It may be an easy job, but when you die, make sure you do something useful first! Just in case, by some coincidence on a universal scale, Lady Oichi were to come across your grave, make sure you died in a way you can tell her with pride!”

“Shaja!” “Testament!”

They all nodded and held their weapons straight up. Then the man on the left end of the front row looked up in the sky and gave a shout.

“A sword in the right hand, the Testament in the left!”

The others yelled the same thing.

“A sword in the right hand! The Testament in the left!”

This time, the woman on the right end of the front row cried out.

“Courage in the right sword, justice in the left Testament!”

“Courage in the right sword! Justice in the left Testament!”

From there on, they all shouted in unison.

“Victory in the right courage! Tolerance in the left justice!”

“Peace in the right victory! Blessings in the left tolerance!”

“Protection in the right peace! Eternity in the left blessings!”

After a cry of “shaja” or “testament”, they took a breath. Next, they all looked into the sky and gave a roar.

“A sword for protection! The Testament for eternity!!”

“Testameeeeeent!!” “Shajaaaaaa!!”

They all prepared their weapons and Katsuie opened his mouth.

“All right! The water hasn’t reached us yet, but the barriers downstream are apparently sparking! ...Mobile shell unit! Form three groups to attack in waves! Open the gate just as Hashiba instructed! From there, the solid and the nimble begin an urban battle in the submerged city!”

He gave one last order.

“Let’s finish this up in fifteen minutes!!”

Those inside Magdeburg held a strategy meeting with a sign frame opened in the center of the cathedral plaza. It displayed a map of Magdeburg that extended more north to south than east to west.

First, Naruze stood at the orchard on the southern end of the map.

“This orchard forms a slope from the outer wall to the river, doesn’t it? It has some hills and our Technohexen unit can stick it out firing from the sky, so I’d like to ask anyone who can’t fly to fire from the western wall.”

She swept a borrowed spear across the map’s orchard and a red line appeared along its path. She was indicating that they would concentrate their fire to stop

the warriors advancing from the southern gate.

“We’ll guide them. Instead of driving them toward the outer wall, we’ll send them to the river.”

Guericke then raised his hand.

“Guiding them to the outer wall would take them along the western side where there are more hills, so it would be more difficult for them to advance. Wouldn’t it be best to fight them there instead of by the river?”

“More hills means it’s harder for us to target them. The outer wall is kind of like a mountain. And once the enemy has climbed the mountain, what do you think they’ll do when they realize they have a hilly way down to the northern urban area? Since there isn’t a set path, they’ll split into small units and move toward the city separately. Then the gunfire from the outer wall won’t be able to keep up.”

Naruze used the spear to indicate the path along the river.

“We’ll use our concentrated fire to keep them from the outer wall as much as possible. In the worst case, the high-speed mobile shells will rush in at quick but subsonic speeds, but they’ll be like sitting ducks on a straight path. We can fire horizontally at them from the city’s buildings. Once the water rises enough, the mobile shells will be out of the fight, but that will mean the lighter fighters who can travel through the mountains are coming. Those will be from P.A. Oda.”

Naruze continued from there.

“When that happens, those of us who can fly will fire on them from above. I’d like permission to use explosion spells.”

Guericke’s eyebrows moved at that.

“Those are the tactics of the anti-nonhuman mountain unit.”

“It’s officially known as the anti-witch unit, right? My father was a part of it.”

After Naruze sharply gave just the main points, Guericke finally nodded.

“You have permission.”

“Judge. I’ll be asking you to print my summer works, so make sure you’ve

reconstructed by then.”

Only those behind Guericke saw him clench a fist in celebration behind his back.

“But...”

This new voice belonged to Tomoe who looked at the interception formation Naruze had drawn.

“There are only a little over twenty Technohexen while the enemy is led by an assault unit of five thousand with twenty five thousand staying back to secure their escape route. With a difference in numbers that great, we should assume they’ll make it to the city pretty quickly.”

“And then it will be an urban battle.”

Futayo spoke up from the city portion of the map and she addressed what she held in her hand.

“I am very grateful for the repairs to Tonbokiri.”

“Thankful,” added Tonbokiri which now had Western decorations.

Using the spear, Futayo drew a line between the city and the orchard.

“I and Magdeburg’s three hundred crossdressing warriors will be waiting here to slow the enemy’s advance along with the gunfire from the city. And on top of that...”

She looked to one corner of the plaza where Neshinbara sat on the ground, leaning up against a bench. He was covered in oil and dirt and he waved a hand her way.

Futayo nodded.

“While we buy some time, the noncombatants will be evacuated to Magdeburg’s transport ship in the nature park behind the cathedral. I would also like to ask that the hemispheres and other equipment are taken aboard. Once our defense line and the loading of the equipment is complete...”

She drew a line along the river.

“We will release the defense barriers bordering the Elbe River. By then, the

water will likely have already flooded a fair bit, but by letting the water in ourselves, we can stop the enemy from advancing too far.”

In other words...

“We will flood our enemies along with Magdeburg and escape on the transport ship.”

They would submerge Magdeburg themselves.

After hearing that plan, it was the silver god of war on the north end of the map who nodded in agreement. Anne leaned forward on its shoulder.

“Yes, and we can escape to the Hexagone Française fleet arriving from the west. They will protect us. I’m not sure I like the idea of flooding the city, but when the other option is having it destroyed, I supposed it’s the better one. ... Can we estimate how long until that happens?”

“We can.” Mazarin opened a *signe cadre* from where she stood next to Anne. “In approximately ten minutes. Thanks to the adjustments to the defense barriers by Musashi’s secretary, M.H.R.R. is likely expecting a full flood after ten minutes, so they will probably try to break through then.”

“But we will do it for them ahead of time? That will only confuse the enemy at first, but since we know the flood will come early, we can arrange our personnel and secure our escape routes accordingly. If you are one of the fighters and anything happens to you, you can escape west from the city walls. Hexagone Française will protect you.”

They all nodded and one of them, Masazumi, stood up. She then looked to Naruze and Futayo.

“As vice president I leave all immediate decisions to you two. The only remaining problem is the Musashi and our idiot.”

“My foolish brother will be here. As will the Musashi.”

Kimi crossed her arms while leaning against one of the plaza’s trees.

“Isn’t that right, Naruze?”

“Judge. Margot is with him, so they’ll definitely be on their way here. As for the Musashi...”

Naruze pointed to the northern sky with her spear.

“Hashiba gave a new warning against cruising here. Isn’t that right, Asama?”

“Yes,” said a long-haired figure walking from the cathedral.

It was Asama. She had changed into her shrine maiden outfit and several sign frames followed her around. She gave a sigh and then raised a hand toward Masazumi.

“I somehow managed to pick up the records from just before the divine transmissions were cut off. Hashiba did send a warning to the Musashi. Simply put, they said ‘we’ll be mad if you fly’.”

“Heh heh. How silly. If they say that, of course they’re going to fly.” Kimi looked at Asama and then the northern sky. “Horizon already tried to go save my foolish brother, so if you try to stop her here, she’ll definitely be coming.”

“My theory is Hashiba was trying to provoke them.”

“Go to sleep, nerd. We all know you’re half dead after rearranging those barriers.” Kimi took a step forward. “Heh heh. My foolish brother is coming, so is Horizon, and we’re about to go to Kantou. This should be a fun trip, but...”

She turned back to Neshinbara who was still sitting.

He nodded toward her sharp gaze.

“We already went over it, so you say it yourself, Aoi Sister-kun.”

“Judge.” She took a breath, shook her shoulders, and looked across everyone there. “Boys and girls of Musashi, once the city begins to flood, make sure to withdraw and come here. Don’t even think about waiting for my foolish brother or protecting the city. After all...”

After all...

“As soon as the Musashi arrives and takes us onboard, we will leave for Edo even if my foolish brother is not with us.”

“W-wait, Kimi!”

Someone frantically spoke up when they heard that.

It was Asama.

Asama quickly walked over to Kimi.

...We'll leave Toori-kun and the others behind?

She knew what Kimi meant. If waiting would place the entire Musashi in danger, they would have to leave even Toori behind.

That also means leaving Mito, Mary, and Tenzou behind, but...

...It's a lot like Kimi to take on that role by only mentioning Toori-kun.

But, thought Asama. *Are you really okay with that, Kimi?*

She took a few more steps toward the girl.

"Um, Kimi?"

But after moving that close, she realized something.

Kimi's lowered right hand was clenched so tightly it was growing pale.

...Ah.

The girl was acting composed, but she was not. She was holding back and suppressing something to keep control of herself.

After taking a deep breath and gently moving her shoulders up and down to calm herself, Kimi spoke.

"What is it, Asama?"

She was smiling and she added a quiet sigh of a laugh.

"Don't worry. Even if that does happen, Mitotsudaira's mother, Anne over there, and the rest of Hexagone Française will protect them. So...we won't be abandoning them. We'll only be leaving them here. Right?"

Hearing that, Asama mentally lowered her shoulders in relief.

...I can only say that this is a lot like Kimi.

After all, when she said "don't worry" or "right?", she was not speaking to

anyone. Unless she said “Asama” or “you” afterwards, she was speaking to herself.

And so Asama asked a question to see just how little her childhood friend had changed.

“Kimi, aren’t you worried about Toori-kun and the others?”

Kimi’s smile shook a little, but...

“I am. But a woman who doesn’t trust in you is nothing but a bother.”

“Then...”

Asama placed her own hand over Kimi’s clenched right fist, looked the girl in the eye, and pulled on her hand.

“Let’s wait together as long as we can, okay?”

Kimi initially resisted to having her hand taken, but then she acquiesced. She gave her hand to Asama.

“C’mon now. Two girls holding hands in public?”

“If I’m not holding your hand, I have a feeling you’ll try to be the last one to withdraw or even return here.”

“Heh heh. That’s really not fair, you know? You shouldn’t assume other people would do what you’re thinking of doing.”

“S-stop saying things like that!”

Had Kimi angered her to make it easier to hold her hand and keep her from letting go?

While wondering that, Asama squeezed Kimi’s hand. She then looked around and saw Magdeburg’s men and crossdressers nod her way. The commander lightly raised his hand.

“We will do our utmost to defend until Musashi’s king can return... Oh, dear. I’m sounding too manly.”

The crossdresser laughed bitterly and the rest laughed along with him. Anne did the same from the shoulder of the silver god of war sitting in front of them. She made even the god of war shake a little in laughter before speaking.

“Sister of Musashi’s chancellor? I also have a brother, but I wonder if I can really say I’m the ‘same’.”

She looked to Asama and to the hand holding Kimi’s hand.

“Make sure not to let go of that hand.”

“Eh? Oh, right. Judge.”

“Eh? Oh, dear. This well-endowed shrine maiden just agreed to become one with me! She wants us to bring our bodies together!!”

Please shut up, thought Asama as she glared at the idiot’s wiggling sister.

Suddenly, a noise reached them from the south.

The heavy sound as if from something striking stone sounded again and again. Everyone there brought up their guard as soon as they heard it.

“The enemy is here,” said Anne. “Just ten more minutes. It’s time to show our endurance.”

Chapter 75: Breacher of Defenses

CHAPTER 75

"Breacher of Defenses"



These people
Raise their valiant voices
Point Allocation (Assault)

These people

Raise their valiant voices

Point Allocation (Assault)

The invasion began with a one-sided collision.

White mobile shells moved north up the road south of Magdeburg that ran alongside the Elbe River. The two out front activated shield spells.

“Charrrrrge!!”

The next four carried a wooden stake with the front end hardened by spells.

It collided with the main southern gate and the nearby wall. The mobile shells used spell acceleration to run quickly enough to almost float up from the ground and they let go of the stake in the instant of impact.

It struck.

A great roar filled the sky, the two with shields remained, and the four with the stake scattered.

But when they looked to the point of impact, they saw a boxy cross emblem appear and spray scattered from it.

“That thing’s tough! Does the defensive barrier pass through the wall, too!?”

The next four picked up the repelled stake and quickly moved back while still protected by the leading two’s shields. That rotation of ten mobile shells continued without rest and countless roars of impact rang out.

They struck again and again, but the wall did not break and the gate was not broken.

Then shellfire arrived from above the city’s wall.

Magdeburg was surrounded by defensive barriers that redirected attacks outward. The city fired back using fixed cannons given barrier neutralizing spells. The fixed cannons primarily fired homing shells, so the countless shells curved toward the attacking stake and crossed paths with it.

The exchange of projectiles and direct impacts continued without end, but...

“It’s gradually getting weaker!”

Light began to appear above Magdeburg. The repeated impacts and the pressure of the water by the river was forcing Magdeburg’s defensive barrier to remain constantly active.

The defensive light grew stronger toward the river. It would also grow stronger by the southern gate in the instant of impact, but a moment later it grew thin enough to see clearly inside.

“It really is getting weaker! All right! Just like Hashiba said it would!”

In the center of the southern road, Katsuie smiled with his arms crossed despite being in range of the homing shells.

“Keep the attacks up enough that none of the shells come my way! Hashiba estimated it would take three minutes and twenty-one seconds, but let’s shorten that! She may have worked hard calculating it all out, but we’ve gotta show her we’re even better than that! Otherwise...”

Katsuie slowly started north alongside the Elbe which had begun surging backwards. He drew the rest of the force with him and pushed the front line onward at his own pace.

“Yeah, otherwise, she’d hold back when it’s time to kill me! That’s just the kind of person she is!”

Inside Magdeburg, the positioning of the defenders and the evacuation to the transport ship behind the cathedral were continuing simultaneously.

It was a cloudy night with no sign of the stars or moon, but the light of the barrier surrounding Magdeburg created shadows everywhere.

However, Asama had a stern look in her eyes as she looked up at the light and hurried to the transport ship.

“The water level to the northeast is now about a meter higher than the city. In another minute, about half of the city will be like that.”

“Heh heh. If I only we could have stopped by the streets below that to view the barrier like an aquarium. But Asama? Aren’t you going to let go of my hand? C’mon, alreadyyy.”

“I’m not going to stop just because you wiggle around in protest.”

As the light continued to grow above those two and the other noncombat students, some intermittent waves came into view.

Meanwhile, Righteousness was waiting with the Palais-Cardinal in front of the cathedral so they could carry the Magdeburg Hemisphere to the transport ship. It was currently speaking with Guericke in front of the five meter metal hemisphere he had taken from the cathedral.

“Satomi’s castle uses this same type of barrier that covers the entire city, but I’ve never seen one pushed this far. How long do you expect it to hold?”

“It has plenty of power, so that shouldn’t be a problem. However, the actual fuel that supports it comes from the ether fuel tank below the cathedral and the output opening is too small. This artificial flooding of the city was not supposed to be a part of the history recreation, after all.”

Next to them, Anne instructed the Palais-Cardinal from its shoulder and the god of war easily picked up the hemisphere and placed it on a giant cart. Adele was standing on the cart and the shaking knocked her onto her butt.

“Sorry. That was a little rough,” quickly called out Anne. “Now, Mayor Guericke, is this what you are trying to say? In a strict following of the history recreation, the Sack would only include the cannon fire and invasion?”

“Testament. Of course, we only have ourselves to blame for naively assuming the enemy would follow those same rules.”

“Um, excuse me! I’ve finished loading up the cart!” said Adele after checking on the hooks holding the ropes in place.

Guericke, Mazarin, and more than thirty other students climbed aboard the cart, Righteousness moved in front of it, and the Palais-Cardinal moved behind it.

The sounds of shellfire and collisions could be heard and light filled the city from the sky. The Palais-Cardinal began pushing the cart and Anne laughed

quietly from its shoulder.

“Sorry, I know this isn’t the time, but I used to do this long ago in a small village I was staying in to recuperate. Then again, it wasn’t in the middle of a battle, the cart was pulled by oxen or horses, it carried vegetables and hay, and...”

An especially loud crash came from the south and Anne mentioned why everyone turned in that direction with stiff expressions.

“And, well, no one was breaking down my front door with a stake.”

“Have Tomoe’s idiots and Musashi’s idiots started fighting M.H.R.R. at Magdeburg yet?”

A female voice asked a question in a grassy field at night.

The owner of the voice was staring westward toward a distant bay.

“Hah. Not that Tomoe matters. That woman has always loved defying things and being attacked. So how’s Musashi doing, Satou Brothers?”

“Testament, Lady Yoshitsune.”

Two elderly men kneeled in the field at the same moment and the left one spoke first.

“Word took a few minutes to reach us, but it seems the Musashi has begun powering up all eight ships.”

The right one spoke next.

“I believe they have been discussing what to do about M.H.R.R.’s ban on cruising. Some Catholic ships have already begun to gather in the northern Protestant principalities of M.H.R.R. to keep an eye on them. They will likely attack if the Musashi does begin to move.”

“Kah kah kah. That thing’s too big and slow. How long are they gonna keep this up? They should just get going already.”

“According to my calculations, they need to leave in the next three minutes or even a trip at full speed gravitational cruising will not be enough to arrive in time

for the battle.”

“Oh?” The corners of Yoshitsune’s lips loosened. “So we can see what Musashi has chosen in the next three minutes, can we? Will they come here to Qing-Takeda and take care of the Battle of Mikatagahara on the way to Kantou, or will they take one look at P.A. Oda, decide to leave M.H.R.R. from the north, and head back to their European course?”

The bay up ahead was dark below the cloudy night sky, but occasionally...

“That’s ether light, isn’t it? Dragons are ascending through the dragon lines that still haven’t calmed down.”

As she spoke, a thin line of red light raced from the bay to the sky. It bent to the north but ultimately vanished.

“The disappearance of Mikawa, everything Motonobu said and did, and the Princess Disappearances are all such a mystery. I tried looking into what Masazumi was talking about, but I can’t stand those musty old documents.”

“If you had told us, we would have done it.”

“Show some class and don’t get in the way of my hobby. And anyway, there’s something else I have to do right now.”

Yoshitsune looked behind her where a massive group of cannons awaited.

Beyond the long rows of mobile cannon platforms was a single object too wide for her to see all at once.

That largest mobile cannon platform was shaped like it was prostrating and it supported the full force there.

“Not only is that the three kilometer long, three hundred meter tall floating mobile city Tsutsuji, but it’s also Benkei. And he’s accompanied by the floating cities of our mobile nation. We only ever show off the commerce district when trading, so I can’t wait to see the looks on their faces when they see it in full combat mode. And by ‘they’, I mean Masazumi and that naked idiot.”

“I have a feeling Musashi’s chancellor will say it is ‘cool’,” said the right of the Satou Brothers.

The left one looked up at the giant cannons rising from all of the cities and into

the sky.

“I suppose we will be using this before long, when the Musashi arrives.”

“Yes. ...I’ll lose my Shingen name during Mikatagahara and we’ll be using this for the Battle of Nagashino, the coming showdown with P.A. Oda.”

With the pale city lights on her back, Yoshitsune spoke to the large floating city with cannons on the left and right.

“Hey, once Musashi gets here, you’ll probably get to lighten up a bit again, Benkei.”

As if to answer her, light gathered in the half cylinder protrusion on the front end of the floating city.

The massive floating city resembled a human lying prone and the Satou Brothers checked the sign frames that appeared by their hands simultaneously.

“It seems Hexagone Française has begun to descend west of Magdeburg.”

“So they’ll descend, gather together, and – since they’re in a hurry – send in each unit as it’s ready, huh!? This is going to be quite the battle of attrition!”

Yoshitsune looked to the light that was Benkei’s eyes and the corner of her mouth bent in a smile.

“Interesting. This one is going to come down to the wire!”

An attack struck the south side of Magdeburg.

A hardened wooden stake was driven a third of the way into the space between the wall and the southern gate.

M.H.R.R.’s mobile shell unit had finally gotten through a gap in the weakened defensive barrier due to the combination of the flooding and the repeated strikes of the stake.

Bluish-white spray continually arced and burst through the air around the stake. It had torn through the barrier spell, so the ether was disturbed and unable to construct the barrier.

The M.H.R.R. Catholic mobile shell unit moved back, formed up, and rushed

toward that spot.

There were one thousand of the high-speed mobile shells in all. They formed a line of five hundred on the left and right and they all held Catholic shield spells overhead.

This created a path protected from above by the glowing shield umbrellas and protected on either side by the lines of mobile shells.

But after forming the path, they prepared to charge at the wooden stake stabbed into the side of the southern gate.

“Get ready!”

The holy spell accelerators on the backs of their shoulders caused the heavy white mobile shells to float from the ground.

“Testament!!!”

That M.H.R.R. Catholic mobile shell unit contained more members from Catholic M.H.R.R. principalities than from P.A. Oda. There was a lot of conflict with the students from P.A. Oda, but...

“Landsknechte Rule 74!”

They all replied with “testament”. Even those from P.A. Oda used “testament” now instead of “shaja”.

As for why...

“We are the descendants of knights and we obey our master on the battlefield as mercenaries!”

“Testament!!”

“If they become our enemy, we treat them as enemies! If they become our ally, we treat them as allies! That is the way of the Landsknechte!”

“Testament!!”

On the battlefield, none of them cared where the others were from, what race they were, or what color their skin, eyes, or hair were. There was really only one thing they did care about.

“Any of us who obstruct our mission will receive a joint trial! Dedicate your life

to the mission given to us by our master!”

“Testament!”

A moment later, the path created by two lines of five hundred accelerated.

They ran.

Fragments of holy spell emblems scattered from the ejection points of their accelerators and they raced forward. The homing shells did not let up and they began focusing in on the two lines, but even as shields broke or the solid sounds of direct hits rang out, they all supported each other.

“Onward!”

As they accelerated, they essentially began to fly.

“We are the descendants of knights hired for four gulden a month!”

“We are the Landsknechte who bring an end to the history of mercenaries! We are the final order of knights!”

“We are those who create a blot on the M.H.R.R. Catholic name with this Sack!”

They all nodded and straightened their lines as they arrived at the city wall.

“But we are the final order of knights that protects the Holy Roman Empire!”

They finished straightening out, and...

“Brakes!!”

They all shut off their accelerators and slammed on the brakes using the soles of their feet and their physical strength.

As they slid forward, the front row reached Magdeburg’s southern gate and the wooden stake.

They had formed a five hundred man path leading up to it.

“Not a bad job!”

A wind raced down that path. Lily emblems appeared across that wind’s body as he flew below the roof of shields. His skin was dark and he sped up each time the emblem’s shined brighter.

“Prepare for the assault!”

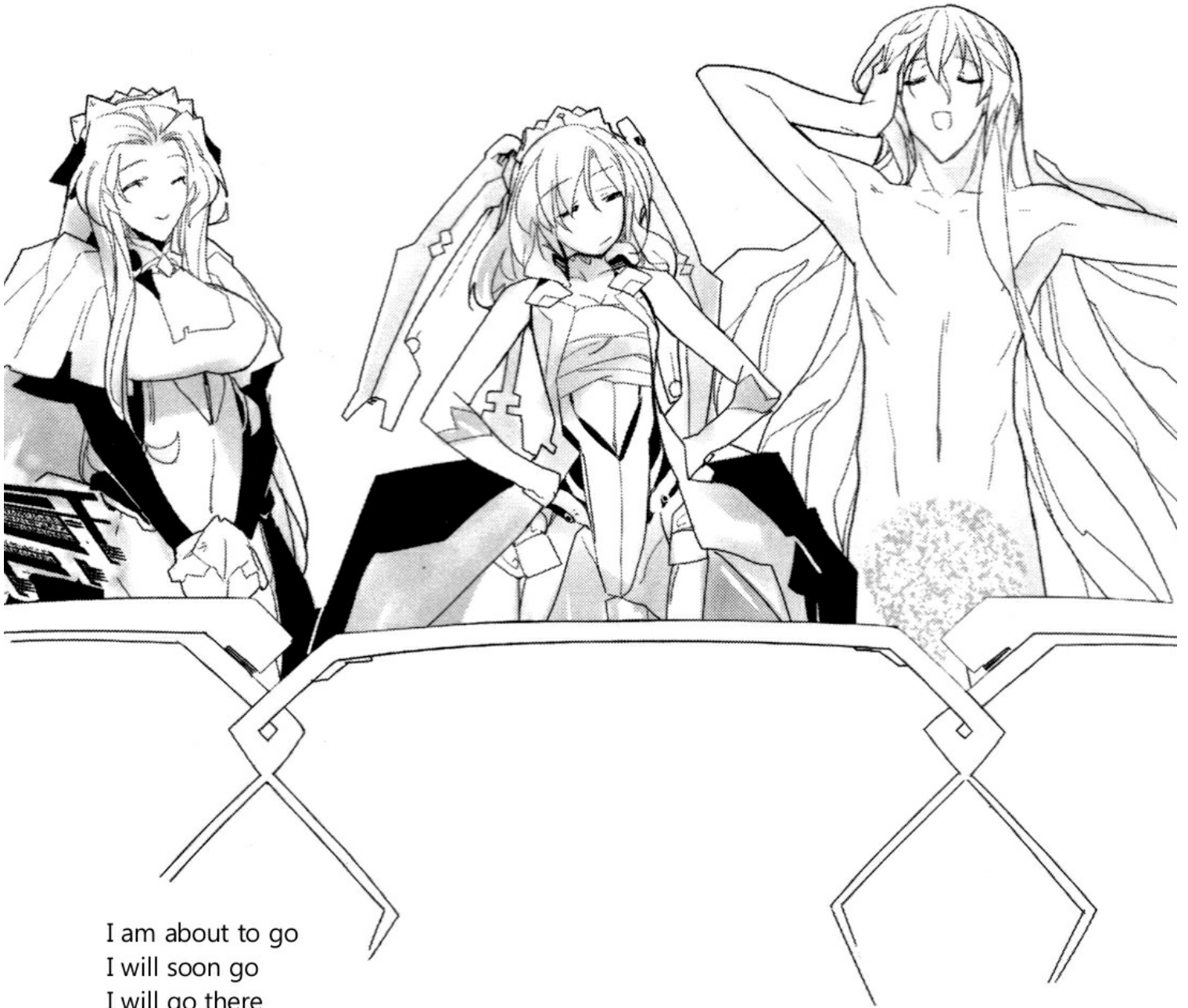
As he shouted, he instantly arrived at the wooden stake. He pressed down on his running legs, swung up his lowered body, and gave a yell.

“Lily Flowerrrrr!!”

Chapter 76: Runner on the Battlefield

CHAPTER 76

"Runner on the Battlefield"



I am about to go
I will soon go
I will go there

Point Allocation (Forceful)

I am about to go

I will soon go

I will go there

Point Allocation (Forceful)

From overhead, the light covering Magdeburg could be seen growing explosively brighter.

A man and woman viewed it from the front deck of the Hexagone Française flagship, the Pension Versailles, which was stopped on a hill west of Magdeburg.

The woman held a wooden sword against the floor and her eyes turned to Magdeburg's south gate.

"Dammit! So they broke through!"

The gate had been broken. Narimasa's accelerated attack had hit the stake like an uppercut.

Driving that wooden stake in diagonally from below was enough to tear through and destroy the defensive barrier.

There was now a hole in the barrier as well as the gate and wall.

The barrier's automatic replenishment effect would have filled the hole before long, but the mobile shells near the lead rushed in with their shields to counteract that replenishment effect.

Engineering students in lighter P.A. Oda uniforms could be seen rushing down the five hundred man path. They were probably going to solidify the hole.

Some gunfire came from within the hole and the cannons on the city wall continued to target the five hundred man path, but another unit rushed down the path of shields and the path itself started pouring down itself from the back.

"They're invading Magdeburg! Are you okay with that, Exiv!?"

"Heh. Calm down, Terumoto. You must not get violent...against me."

Terumoto dropped her right heel on the nudist's right foot. The surrounding

people shrieked and shrank back, the nudist's expression vanished as he collapsed to the floor, and Terumoto glared at him.

"Oh, sorry. I tried to take a step toward you, but there was a foot in the way."

"U-um, Lady Terumoto?"

Mouri-01 spoke up with several *signe cadre* opened around her. She stood next to Terumoto and gestured down toward their warriors lowering from the other ships and preparing for battle.

"Look to the left. Those are Hexagone Française's famous special forces, the Gallican Good Morning Unit."

"Oh, you mean the special forces who claim to only hit their opponents to 'wake them up in the morning' because monks aren't allowed to fight? Those are the ones that go around hitting people with their weapons shouting 'good morning' even in the middle of the night, aren't they? ...They sure do put the 'special' in special forces."

"Anyway, Lady Terumoto, the assault unit is in the process of being deployed. Once a third of them are ready, they can be sent in."

"How long until then?"

"Four minutes."

Terumoto frowned at that but then sighed.

"It's no use getting mad at you."

"Um, what about at Lord Exiv?"

"It's fine when it's him." She kicked him where he still lay on the ground. "In other words, you're saying we didn't make it in time?"

"Testament. We are justifying our actions as coming to meet Lady Anne of Austria and we had planned to enter the city and defend against the Sack on the pretext of ensuring her safety."

"But now we can't do that?"

"Testament. Driving in that wooden stake has established direct conflict between Magdeburg and the M.H.R.R. Catholics. The Sack has begun between

them. Our justification is considered less important than the history recreation, so we can no longer interfere.”

“No, we can’t.”

Terumoto clicked her tongue and looked to Magdeburg. The defense near the gate had already stopped, but the powerful waves of light running through the defensive barrier prevented her from seeing what was happening inside.

She then asked Mouri-01 a question.

“How exactly are you negotiating with the other nations to justify our assault? If I’m interrupting, don’t answer and keep working. You can tell me when you have time.”

“Testament. I am mostly sticking with our original plan, but I am gaining the support of the other nations by saying we will be rescuing Lady Anne of Austria. In other words, I am saying M.H.R.R. is misusing the history recreation to kill off Lady Anne.”

“That argument sounds familiar.”

“Testament. Musashi used it at Mikawa and England. I thought that precedent would make it easier for the other academies to accept. Tres España and England have already agreed, K.P.A. Italia’s resistance student council has begun making statements and has agreed, and both Chancellor William of Holland and Chancellor Christina of Sweden have also-...”

A new *signe cadre* appeared and Mouri-01 smiled when she saw it.

“Approval has surpassed fifty percent. Handling it all at once in a meeting is convenient, but when it’s treated as an individual issue...”

“They’ll decide everything at once at the later international council of Westphalia, hm? Well, keep up the diplomacy to make sure they don’t change their minds by then. ...Regardless, you’re good at this and I’m thankful.”

“Your praise honors me. But...”

“But?”

“Testament.” Mouri-01 placed a hand on her chin and looked at a few *signe cadre*. “The academies of nations bordering P.A. Oda have placed a condition on

our rescue. They say they cannot agree unless we only move in to save Lady Anne of Austria once she is actually under attack, not just in danger.”

“Yeah, if we crushed an M.H.R.R. assault unit just because they were dangerous, anyone bordering P.A. Oda might get invaded ‘because they’re dangerous’.”

“Heh. No need to worry about that,” said someone else.

It was the nudist who had stood up from the floor.

Terumoto saw the nudist brush up his bangs and strike a pose.

“Listen,” he said. “Anne will have anticipated this situation and will act accordingly. After all, she has Luynes with her.”

“You mean...?”

“Testament.” Exiv looked down at Magdeburg’s light with a bitter smile on his lips. “Although, can you really say someone is ‘under attack’ if she is prepared to fight? Anyway, have everyone prepare to head in. I guarantee you Anne intends to draw all of the enemies into Magdeburg. That way she can give us all the credit.”

“The credit?”

Terumoto frowned and Exiv nodded.

“Their strategy is likely to flood Magdeburg themselves and catch M.H.R.R. in the middle of it. I expect they will remove the barrier at some point to let the water in and then escape on a transport ship already inside the city. We will stop M.H.R.R.’s attack ships from targeting Anne’s transport ship and our attack will crush the M.H.R.R. forces attempting to escape the city as it sinks into the mud. And we will do it all in the name of defeating any enemy that attempts to harm Anne.”

He sighed.

“Honestly, she’s probably thinking of improving Hexagone Française’s international standing by giving us all of the credit here. Once again, she is seeing just how high she can lift Hexagone Française.”

“As her brother, do you wish she would simply ask you to come save her?”

“I care more about you, Terumoto.”

He said it so readily that Terumoto was briefly dumbfounded and he then turned toward her.

“Why are you blushing, Terumoto?”

“Shut up, you moron. Quit getting off topic. And Mouri-01, don’t look away and smile.” Terumoto pointed toward Magdeburg. “Anyway, are you saying Anne is enjoying herself in there?”

“Testament. I doubt she will show herself until all of the enemy has invaded the city. That way she can establish our justification to act. To put it another way, the moment the siege troops fully enter the city is the moment when Anne is ‘in direct danger’. We attack then.”

Exiv crossed his arms and gave Terumoto a sparkling smile.

“Heh. That is why I told you to calm down, Terumoto. Because Anne is perfect.”

“You haven’t done anything!!”

As soon as she dropped her heel on his left foot, a great roar came from Magdeburg. The destruction of the southern gate had grown even larger. Mouri-01 frowned when she saw it.

“M.H.R.R.’s main five companies – three thousand men in all – have entered with the thousand man mobile shell battalion in the lead!”

Magdeburg’s defense against the invaders was split into two groups.

This was because the heavily-equipped M.H.R.R. mobile shell unit took the riverside path and the more lightly-equipped P.A. Oda assault unit took the hilly orchard path.

With the flooding Elbe River visibly pressing against the barrier, Magdeburg’s forces fired and M.H.R.R.’s forces advanced using a rotation between the armor of the mobile shells and the spell shields.

In the orchard, Magdeburg's forces fired back from either the top or bottom of the fortress wall while falling back toward the city.

The orchard area had originally contained fruit trees and fields, but the trees had been cut down and the stonework around the stepped fields had crumbled.

However, remnants of the stepped structure remained and there was a path.

"It may not be the scorching wind of the Middle East, but there's still wind! Go!"

The P.A. Oda students all grabbed Mlasi-style cloth spell charms that were not made of paper or parchment. Some wrapped them around their forehead, some around their ankles, and some around their shoulders.

"Shaja!"

The spell cloth had ether-filled spirit threads woven into them, so they acted as ether fuel tanks and were highly durable. While Tsirhc spells tended to focus on religious precepts, these included some religious precepts but were mostly related to commerce or to surviving the harsh environment of the Middle East.

Here, they all used the same one.

"Ride the wind!"

Book-shaped emblems appeared on the outer side of their ankles and Garudas flew out.

"Forward!"

They lowered down as if thrusting a knee forward to take a long step and those students in blue P.A. Oda uniforms began to fly. They were only just skimming off the ground, but they moved swiftly across the slope with several spell cloths wrapped around them like belts as armor.

As if jumping from foothold to foothold or from behind cover to cover, they flipped around, lightly placed a hand on the slope, and flew along like a dancing wind.

On the other hand, the defenders did not hold back. Their job was to drive the enemy toward the river instead of letting them head straight to the city.

The large cannons on top of the city wall were constantly firing. Protestant holy spells were not as powerful as their Catholic counterparts, but that thrift allowed them to be used more often. It could take some time to fill the homing ether cannons with charm cylinders in place of normal shells, but the charm cylinders doubled as a magazine and therefore allowed for rapid-fire use.

Countless curving white paths raced outward, tore into the slope, and launched chunks of dirt into the air. Most of the people blasted upward by direct hits would flip around in midair and land on their feet. They had a trick to accomplishing that.

“Focus your anti-shock spells to the left! The homing shots are only coming from that direction! Also, jump toward the river when they hit to escape as much of the blast as you can!”

The recoil would destroy their wind-riding mobility spells or injure them, but any who could no longer move were healed by summoned Garudas or Djinnns. Others would fire on Magdeburg’s gunners to cover for the injured as they were healed.

However, more attacks came from above. Something fell rapidly toward them.

“Some logs are coming!”

Logs and stones had been hung from halfway up the wall, but once their ropes were cut, they came rolling down the slope. The P.A. Oda men braced themselves.

“What’s this!? These are nothing but heavy weights! Let’s knock them away like Sassa would!”

“Yeah! If we stop them here, we’ll be heroes!”

“ platoons 7 and 8, prepare your defense spells!”

But as they prepared to stop them, they noticed Protestant charms attached to the logs and stones.

“Eeek! This says ‘Woman-Banning Spell that makes anyone it hits unpopular for a full year’!”

“Th-this one says ‘Hair-Cutting Spell that increases the odds of future balding

by 10% each time it hits you, but with you it won't make much difference'!"

"Th-this one over here says 'Reverse-Circumcision Spell that gives you the Reverse-Ueno Effect'!"

They were so flustered that they suffered direct hits and about a dozen of them were blown away while becoming reverse-circumcised, unpopular guys with a risk of future baldness. The Magdeburg warriors and crossdressers in charge of spells shouted down at them from the wall.

"Ha ha ha! Thou shalt not commit adultery!"

"Truly, those with plenty shall not keep it! ...Now do you see how steadfast the Protestants are!?"

"Come back after stopping by Ueno or Morocco!"

They were fired on in protest, so they fired back with their cannons. The exchange of fire looked equal, but the P.A. Oda warriors were being gradually forced further and further down the slope.

But then a metallic sound rang from the top of the city wall toward the southern gate.

It was a sound of destruction.

The Magdeburg warriors turned to look.

"Gah!?"

But something hit them and several of them were knocked into the air.

They had been hit by a cannon. Literally. A large cannon itself had flown through the air and hit them.

The enemy was climbing up from the destroyed southern gate. The individual in the lead had destroyed the cannon by the gate and was now rushing toward them.

"Sassa Narimasa!"

That was exactly who had knocked them and their cannon away with his Lily Flower.

Narimasa ran as he heard cheers rising from the slope below.

Climbing onto the wall from the broken southern gate had been much easier said than done.

Magdeburg's defensive barrier had become a vortex around the widened hole, so he had not been able to use the ladders set up near the destruction.

However, now that he was on top, he could take out the enemy's defenses and he had a straight shot almost all the way to the city.

That was why those on the ground had gone on ahead to draw the defenders' attention.

"So I made an approaching run and jumped up here just to ensure their safety!?"

I'm nothing but a scout running errands, he thought with some resentment toward Katsuie who had suggested this part of the plan. However...

...Well, it's still easier than being the commander.

He had never liked taking or giving orders. His general strategy was to grasp the overall movements on the battlefield, decide "I'll go here", and not worry about anything beyond what he understood.

It used to be that he had been given "you go here, okay?" as his instructions. Katsuie had been his superior at the time, but it had shown how well Katsuie understood him. Katsuie always placed him wherever going on a rampage and moving forward would achieve the desired results.

But since becoming a member of the Six Heavenly Demon Army and the Five Great Peaks, he had been forced to do a lot more troublesome work like training and managing the troops, although he left a lot of that to Toshiie. He had only been able to go nuts at IZUMO two days before because he had been on his way to the gathering of those heading to Magdeburg.

...Things have gotten so much more annoying.

He trusted his master, Nobunaga, and he recognized Nobunaga's strength. Nobunaga knew him just as well as Katsuie did, so he would similarly be told "you go here, okay?". He was always given an accurate spot to go and he was

allowed to do whatever he wanted afterwards, which gave him some breathing room.

However, he would not compromise his true nature.

Historically, Sassa Narimasa eventually ended up under Hashiba's command after Nobunaga's death.

Then, feeling dissatisfied, he rebelled and committed suicide.

Narimasa had desired that role and inherited the name because of his true nature.

After all, Nobunaga's was the greatest name of the Warring States period. That demon lord was full of momentum and was now actually threatening the world.

Rather than being a leftover, Narimasa would take part in it and his part would end once it all fell apart.

He had no interest in Hashiba's later rule. There was no momentum there and it lacked the precious freedom that momentum brought. The breath of freedom was only so refreshing when breathed in an age of tension. In a time of idle peace, freedom was only another word for "boredom".

Narimasa would become a power that threatened the world, but he would live freely in that power. Great strength was needed to accomplish that. He needed enough strength to move freely through a faction able to threaten the world.

That was why he found P.A. Oda to be so much fun.

However...

"Toshi..."

The next group of enemy warriors came into view up ahead.

They fled instead of defending the cannons on the wall.

That was a wise decision.

Narimasa heard his fellow warriors climbing the ladders they had set up behind him, so his enemy would only have bought a few seconds if they had tried to fight back and any injuries would have been for nothing.

But he had a thought as he listened to the footsteps approaching from behind, the screams of those jumping down from the wall to escape, and the cheers from below.

...Sorry.

“I’m going to continue enjoying myself until I eventually meet my downfall, Toshi.”

He ran, did not pursue the retreating enemy, and knocked away a large cannon using a Lily Flower strike.

He heard the destruction and felt the accomplishment of cutting open a path on the front line. He knew he was breaking into the air of the front line that none of his fellow warriors had breathed yet.

“...!”

He ran forward, but heard something behind him as soon as he accelerated.

“An explosion!?”

About a dozen steps behind him, the wall exploded from within and toward the slope.

Rocks flew and rolled towards those on the slope.

“———!!”

The cheers vanished and a confused and angry retreat began.

However, the explosions did not stop there. A second and third followed.

“They’re destroying their own wall to keep us from moving along it!? Not bad!!”

So this place is intent on letting me swallow the air of freedom, is it? thought Narimasa with a smile.

...Can you raise the value of this freedom any higher!?

“This was your doing, wasn’t it!?”

He saw someone flying next to the wall. They wore a white Technohexen outfit and had black wings.

“Musashi’s 4th Special Duty Officer!”

Without looking his way, the Technohexen sent out her right hand and made several scratching motions in the air.

A moment later, some homing shots flew in from close range.

The wall crumbled and stone scattered.

Naruze did not slow her drawing hand. She drew focus lines in all three hundred sixty degrees around Narimasa with some stronger and weaker points, added some lightning effects for an electric strike, and sent it out. However...

“Lily Flower!”

Narimasa stomped on the wall as he ran. The entire stone wall clearly bounced up and down.

“What!?”

Naruze had never seen anything like it before. The entire wall bounced up from the rebound of the stomp. A “sheet” of stonework rose up between her and Narimasa while falling apart.

The wall shot up in a wave-like motion and Naruze’s drawn attack stabbed into it with slicing sound effects.

However, the attack did not reach its target, the wall shield came apart, and...

“...!?”

The stones of the wall suddenly shot her way while crumbling.

While running, Narimasa had kicked the wall toward her.

...Not bad!

Naruze flew out of the way of the stone scattershot.

Narimasa continued sending waves through the wall with his stomps and Naruze accelerated her wings to pursue him.

An exchange of stone scattershot and drawn focus lines began at close range.

“Honestly!” she shouted. “If Musashi doesn’t show up, I’m seriously going to

think about becoming a mercenary!”

“We have a report from a Protestant academy in a neighboring city of the Magdeburg region! There are signs of the M.H.R.R. Catholics entering Magdeburg and beginning a conflict inside! Over.”

The communications automaton’s voice filled Musashino’s bridge.

“Judge. Now, Suzu-sama, ‘Musashino’-sama, I will give my instructions as Vicereine of Musashi: please send the Musashi to Magdeburg immediately.”

“Judge,” said “Musashino” to Horizon who stood in the center of the bridge.

She then bowed to Suzu who strapped into a seat with a seatbelt, said “excuse me”, and placed her hands on the girl’s shoulders from behind.

Suzu breathed in.

“Th-this is...M-Musashi...A-Acting...Captain...Mukai...Suzu.”

Her voice grew quieter and quieter, but the volume did not matter. All that mattered was what she did next.

“Here we...go.”

She reached out a hand toward a floating model of the Musashi.

Its eight ships were lined up side by side and standing vertically.

Horizon glanced out the window where the world was rotated by ninety degrees.

After a moment, the communications automaton spoke again.

“All ships have achieved a ninety degree trim toward the sky. Stress on the ships is being reduced by setting the floating ocean surface to forty-two different points. No descent detected. Opening external bulkheads for gravitational cruising. Over.”

“Judge.”

Horizon nodded and a sign frame appeared. It showed Naomasa inside the maintenance hangar. She was hanging down by Jizuri Suzaku using her false arm.

“Everything’s good in the engine division. The Musashi King went sliding away with Adele’s mobile shell earlier, but he’s fine. Muneshige and the Sanada group have finished distributing fixation charms throughout the residential areas.” Exasperation filled Naomasa’s tone as she continued. “We tried to use this kind of short burst of gravitational cruising back at IZUMO, but I can’t believe we’re using it to ‘fire’ ourselves to Magdeburg along a ballistic course to get around M.H.R.R.’s ban on ‘cruising’ over their territory. ...That Musashi King is something of a dreamer, isn’t he?”

Behind her, Yoshiyori could be seen holding onto Yatsufusa.

“Do you do this kind of thing all the time!?” he asked with a bitter smile. “This is incredible!”

“Not all the time,” replied Horizon. “This is only the...second time we have gone vertical.”

“Are you sure these aren’t the early stages of it becoming an all the time kind of thing?” asked Naomasa. “Not that it matters. Suzu, make it quick. Get us going.”

“Right...”

Suzu nodded, felt from below that each of the eight ships was opening its external bulkheads, and breathed in. She then raised her eyebrows and spoke.

“F-fire the Musashi...to M-Magdeburg!!”

The night air sank toward a land port along the provisional border between M.H.R.R. and Holland.

“———”

Directly above, eight ships faced the dark clouds of the sky and opened their external armor like wings.

Light was emitted from within the opened sections of armor, and...

“All ships, beginning vertical firing. Over.”

In response to that announcement, a high-pitched noise began to roar and

wind began to blow.

The wind was not being ejected. The wind carried torn grass with it as it was sucked into the Musashi's opened armor.

This was proof that the gravity bands were activating to prepare for gravitational cruising. The light grew as the noise gained a rhythm as if rising in pitch.

“Activate. Over.”

With that, the eight ships fell by a relatively short distance measured in dozens of meters.

They fell, but a moment later, something burst.

The land port, the surrounding forests, and the surrounding mountains all shook and the shockwave was enough to rip trees up by the roots. A white mist raced across the earth, covered the forests, and washed down across the shallow mountain ridges like waves.

And then the Musashi vanished.

However, there was now a hole in the dark clouds above and that hole revealed the starry sky.

A great noise from beyond shook the clouds.

That was the sound of the Musashi changing direction to the southeast, to Magdeburg.

Chapter 77: Attacking Woman by the Water

CHAPTER 77

"Attacking Woman by the Water"



This action is needed
To incite repentance
Point Allocation (Prostration)

This action is needed

To incite repentance

Point Allocation (Prostration)

In the park a bit north of Magdeburg's cathedral, the evacuees and hemispheres were being loaded onto the transport ships supplied by the city.

There were three Dragon-class ships there. Guericke and the other Europeans boarded one, Masazumi, Kimi, Asama, and the Far Easterners boarded another, and the hemisphere cart was loaded onto the final one by Righteousness and the Palais-Cardinal. Adele guided them as they loaded it.

"Okay! Oh, over there! Over there! Over there! No, not there! Here!"

While the girl gave her instructions and gestures, Yoshiyasu had a thought inside Righteousness.

...The Musashi is supposed to be a transport ship, but is all of their work this careless?

Anne and Mazarin commented from the Palais-Cardinal's shoulder.

"Milady, how are you able to work with instructions like this?"

"That's a good question, Luynes. I think it's because I'm too nice."

The Palais-Cardinal then addressed Yoshiyasu while holding half of the hemisphere cart.

"This took a fair bit of time. If it wasn't for the barrier ceiling, we could have flown this here."

Hearing that, Yoshiyasu looked up at the glowing barrier covering the sky. She judged the distance by eye and then looked to the six large wing-shaped flight devices on the Palais-Cardinal's back.

"So you have the same flight ability as our Yatsufusa."

"Isn't that confidential information?"

It took Yoshiyasu a moment to respond.

“Ah.”

To hide her feeling of wrongdoing, she pushed the cart into the hangar. The Palais-Cardinal helped with Anne smiling bitterly on its shoulder.

“There. ...Anyway, so much has happened that I’m feeling a little scatterbrained,” said Yoshiyasu.

“Oh, sorry. Our people did do a lot to you.”

Adele bowed her way after climbing down from the hemisphere cart and leaving the ship.

...That they certainly did, but...

“I may have lost my focus a bit after this much contact with Musashi’s strange atmosphere. Satomi is a small nation, so you have to stay focused on whatever you’re working at, be it politics, economics, or defense. So...I had come to a decent understanding of the Palais-Cardinal’s power when you pulled on my hand and trained with me, but I mistakenly assumed that meant we were sharing our information.”

“That’s fine. We can let that be our little secret.”

Anne added “right?” while looking to Adele and the others working in the hangar.

They had all started working tying down the hemispheres inside the hangar, but they turned back toward Anne, and...

“———”

Every last one of them looked her in the eye and nodded. Some said “testament” and some replied with “judge”.

This is a nice atmosphere, thought Yoshiyasu.

She had seen similar scenes in Satomi. While maintaining Righteousness, her sister had used to bring her homemade snacks, but recently...

...Yoshiyori brings me food.

She stopped thinking there and wondered why her sister and that man tended to overlap in her mind.

...But I don't feel anything wrong with my sister and Anne overlapping in my mind.

Then what was it about her that insisted on rejecting that man?

Yoshiyori sensed a bad habit of hers.

Whenever she thought about something, she would use that man who killed her sister as a comparison or example.

She glanced over at Anne and the vassal below noticed before Anne did.

"What is it?"

The girl tilted her head as she asked, so Yoshiyasu gave a mental sigh that could not be expressed by the god of war's voice device.

"I'm not sure how to put it."

A thought had come to her after leaving Satomi. She had noticed this after seeing other leaders such as Anne and after having a chance to compare them to her sister and that man.

...There are a lot of similarities between Anne, my sister, and that man.

That may have been what a leader was.

That thought had led her to another one during the few days of this journey.

"I need to see so many more things and accept so much more."

"I see..." said the vassal.

The silver god of war turned around and the girl on its shoulder spoke.

"That would be good. You do have a lot of room for growth. ...In the chest for example."

"This isn't just about my chest!"

However, she did feel better now that she had said that. This may not have been something to think about in the middle of a battlefield, but...

...Is this why Yoshiyori forced me to go along with him?

Even if she did not try to understand Yoshiyori himself, she could learn a lot by watching the leaders of other academies. She could observe their attitudes, where they placed their gaze, and their toughness or flexibility.

Her sister was gone, but the other academies were supported by people like her sister. And...

...Does that man play that role for Satomi?

She did not feel entirely certain of it, but that may have been her way of resisting the idea. When she made enough of a concession to think she was bringing too many personal feelings to her official position, a feeling of self-deprecation filled her heart. Regardless, she spoke while listening to the cannon fire and watching the light in the sky.

“Once this battle is over and I return to Kantou, it might not be a bad idea to visit the other nations there a bit. It could be useful to expand Satomi’s trade and political connections.”

If she did that, would she find more approval when she returned?

She was not sure, but the vassal smiled down below.

“The Musashi is great for taking a trip. The travel fees are cheap.”

“Can you at least make sure my bed won’t be destroyed each morning?”

“What are you talking about?”

Hearing Anne’s confused voice, Yoshiyori began wondering how to explain.

...Oh.

I really am feeling a lot better, she thought.

But a sound suddenly reached her auditory device in addition to the continuing cannon fire.

“Impacts? And they seem to be on a pretty large scale.”

“Yes. The defense of the riverside path has started in earnest.”

Work tying down the hemispheres was continuing inside the hangar, but the transport ship was not waiting for it to finish. Bands of mist began to appear around its waterline. Seeing that, Righteousness asked a question.

“So it’ll be leaving as soon as everything’s ready?”

“Testament, as soon as the defensive barrier is removed. ...We’ll be closing up shop quite quickly.”

“Will you be fighting by the river?”

“No,” replied Anne. “Unless it’s an absolute emergency, protecting Magdeburg is a job for the M.H.R.R. Protestants. Well, them and the Musashi which is helping them. If anything, we are only guests. The Satomi family has only been fighting ‘because of possible damage to your cargo’, right?”

“...Sorry.”

“I wasn’t accusing you of anything, so don’t apologize.”

Anne smiled from the silver god of war’s shoulder. As if protecting the three transport ships, she had the god of war take a step north and place a hand on the scabbard at its waist.

Another powerful sound of impact came from the direction of the river.

“That’s quite the noise. I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised.”

Anne explained who was charged with defending that area.

“M.H.H.R.’s secretary and Protestant representative. ...Tomoe Gozen clearly still has her strength.”

The path traveling three hundred meters south to north was approximately six meters wide.

To the west was an earthen slope and to the east was a barrier of white rising into the heavens from the edge of the path. A muddy river reached two meters high just beyond the barrier.

Six cannons were lined up at the city entrance to the north.

A unit of one thousand M.H.R.R. Catholic mobile shells descended the riverside path from the south, but they had been stopped about two hundred meters along. Or more accurately...

“Don’t let them push you back!”

Those in the lead were being worn down, blown away, or torn into.

The loss of the warriors was pushing their ranks back.

There were two reasons for this. The first was the constant fire from the six large cannons. However, the cannons were stuck at a fixed angle and could be dealt with if the front row held their shields just right and set up a rotation.

The real problem was the enemy charging into the front line.

It was a demonic long-lived woman with two horns. She wore Far Eastern armor over an M.H.R.R. girl's uniform and her white headband fluttered in the wind.

"Tomoe Gozen!?"

"You can call me Luther if you want. After all..."

Tomoe swung her arms, both of which held a Testament hammer. Protestant spell charms flew from her wide kariginu-like sleeves. Instead of falling, those spell charms decorated her surroundings and rotated.

"Yes, because I created the foundation of the Modern Kunst."

Six cannons' worth of shells pierced straight down the path.

They reached Tomoe, whose spell charms were rotating around her, and the M.H.R.R. Catholic mobile shell unit, who were confronting her at close range. The mobile shell unit raised their holy spell shields in preparation for the shells.

"C'mon, now. How about we keep fighting without worrying about defense?"

Tomoe rushed in toward them.

The enemy formed a row of three and she stepped between the middle one and the one to her right.

Aiming for the enemies on her left and right, she swung up her two Testament hammers.

First, the right hammer caught on the right elbow of the mobile shell on the right.

Its elbow broke and was knocked upwards. The shield was lifted up along with the arm and a shell struck it.

The impact on the shield knocked the right mobile shell backwards.

However, the mobile shell in the center jumped to his right, which was toward the river, to avoid the left hammer coming his way.

He managed to dodge, but he also ran shoulder-first into the shield-bearing mobile shell by the river.

The one by the river caught and supported his comrade with his shoulder.

That was when Tomoe attacked.

As her left hammer had missed, she swung it straight up as if to pull her body toward the sky.

She had already swung her right hammer upwards, so she swung it downwards and to the left like a pendulum.

The right hammer made a scooping swing with her floating body at the central point.

“Your feet are wide open.”

Ignoring the two shells passing by her back and below her chest, she swept out the feet of the central mobile shell whose balance had been thrown off by the shell hits.

Rather than hit the mobile shell’s legs with the striking surface, she snagged and threw its legs with the joint between the hammer and handle.

The mobile shell and shield spun around and a flying shell struck its back.

The remaining mobile shell by the river held a weapon in the arm that had supported his comrade.

It was a long, thick spear meant for assaults. He used the mobile shell’s reinforced framework to provide powerful speed to an attack directed at Tomoe, who was wide open after swinging her two hammers.

The high-speed attack broke through the wind in an instant, but...

“That height was a mistake.”

As soon as she spoke, a shell from the city hit the spear. A sound of destruction filled the air as the spear was bent and knocked upwards.

“Sorry, but I decided when they would fire, so they aren’t going to hit me,” she said, sounding bored.

By then, the right hammer swinging down below caught up to the left hammer pulling her up into the air.

Both of the hammers now stood straight up, and...

“Now, then.”

She swung the two hammers to the left like a golf club to attack the riverside mobile shell.

The two attacks landed at the same moment she did and the enemy was knocked away, along with his shield.

The shield was knocked upwards, both the enemy’s arms were pulled up with it, and a shell hit his body.

The riverside mobile shell was blasted high into the sky, but...

“...!”

Another row of three charged in.

They had waited for the gap between shells. Tomoe had also created an opening by swinging both hammers up toward the river. She was facing the river and stretched upwards, so the three enemies rushed in toward her side.

The two on either side wielded long spears and the central one wielded a rifle.

Even if she held off the outer two with her hammers, they were prepared to safely finish her off with the central firearm.

The spears came and the gunfire flew.

Tomoe showed a single response.

She jumped straight up and pulled her legs up, as if being lifted by the hammers she had swung upwards.

Her feet surpassed the coming spears, so she stepped on them and made a

light additional jump.

The spell charms flying around her followed her movements.

At this new height, she pulled her legs up further and the bullet passed by below her feet.

She then let go of the hammers and had them rotate in midair.

At the same time, she performed a half spin to turn her back on the group of enemies.

Next, she raised her hands toward the vertically rotating hammers.

By grabbing the handles and swinging them down from front to back, they automatically formed an attack rotating past her legs from top to bottom.

The two backwards-facing midair attacks accurately struck the faces of the two spear-wielding enemies.

She heard a solid sound of collision, the armor broke, and the two mobile shells stopped moving.

Then the cannons fired.

The two enemies were blown away.

However, the central mobile shell charged in after abandoning his rifle. He drew a long sword from his back and targeted Tomoe's waist and back as she dropped down.

Tomoe looked over her left shoulder toward the simple, straight-line attack.

"Please take this."

She threw her left hammer toward the central sword-wielding charge.

However, the mobile shell swung his sword up toward the flying blunt weapon and deflected it into the air.

"...!!"

He immediately went on to slash down toward Tomoe's stomach as she turned around in midair.

In that instant, Tomoe opened her left hand that no longer held a hammer.

And she spoke.

“Activate – Consecutive Style.”

As soon as Tomoe spoke, a spell charm rotating behind her shoulder began to glow.

Smoke rose from the usage meter printed on the charm and a brand appeared there.

While still falling, she swung her left hand.

Just as the rectangular scorch mark appeared on the spell charm, a single large book made of ether was ejected into her hand.

The bluish-white ether book had no decorations and it was six meters tall, six meters wide, and almost a full meter thick.

“This is a copy of the Testament. Nothing could be more important to us Protestants.”

With a movement of her wrist, Tomoe slammed the giant glowing Testament copy into the mobile shell with the sword.

It was a vertical attack.

“You Catholics love idol-worshiping your images of Jesus or the cross. You’re so focused on those things that you’ve lost sight of the teachings in the Testament copies.”

The attack landed and Tomoe spoke quietly to her enemy while the sound of smashing metal rang out.

“Bow before the Testament copy.”

She landed just as the enemy was crushed to a prostration on the ground.

The ether Testament copy vanished at the same moment as the brand for a single usage was completed on the spell charm.

Tomoe then moved forward.

She raised her left hand and smiled toward the row of enemies that moved

back a bit.

“Read through it again, Catholics.”

Several spell charms around her began to glow and seven giant books were produced in a straight line along the path.

The Testament copies made of light opened themselves in the instant they were ejected into midair. They flipped through their glowing pages with a sound like flapping wings.

At the same time, Tomoe crouched down and struck the ground with her left hand.

“Amen.”

The mobile shells cried out as the opened books crashed into them.

The sounds of impact sounded like crashing waves and the ground shook seven times in quick succession.

Destruction and cries of pain sounded out as several dozen mobile shells were destroyed.

They were crushed.

Tomoe grabbed the handle of the fallen hammer with her left hand and moved forward. She leaned forward and raced toward the enemy as if pursuing the giant vanishing books of light.

That was when the muddy Elbe River shook to her left.

“...!?”

As soon as she turned to look, the wall of light holding the flooding river back was cut by a horizontal attack.

...Is he here!?

Tomoe focused on the position on her left that she was just about to pass.

With the enemy group up ahead, turning her body and focus to the left was dangerous; but the person who had suddenly rushed in outdid that.

...He's even more dangerous!

This person had temporarily sliced through the defensive barrier holding back the river.

“So you're here, Shibata Katsuie!?”

The man was soaking wet after easily crossing the muddy river and breaking through the barrier with Kamewari.

Not only was he of the demonic long-lived race, but he was from a combat tribe.

Once he arrived on the path, his eyebrows twisted and he glanced toward the city.

“What the hell!? I thought I was a lot closer to the city than this! Dammit, Narimasa! It's times like this when you're supposed to convince me to bring more weight with me!”

Only then did he seem to notice Tomoe.

“Huh?” He tilted his head. “What!? What's this old hag doing here!? Go up in the mountains to die already!”

“What!? Who the hell are you calling an old hag!? I might as well still be a child!!”

“Huh!?” Katsuie got up and pointed at her while ignoring his wet clothes. “Who in the world would call you a loli hag!?”

Tomoe threw a hammer strike his way.

The hammer and Kamewari collided and sparks flew.

Their weapons were not the only things knocked back; they themselves were knocked back.

After taking up a position five meters away, Tomoe noticed the timing of Katsuie's footwork.

...Oh?

She realized he had begun his attack at the exact same time as she had hers.

...He's gotten pretty good.

She was from the direct line of the demonic long-lived race which was very similar to humans. However, he was from the combat type that had apparently come about during the era in which the gods had ascended to heaven.

And both types had seen a sharp decline during the Genpei War and the later Kamakura period.

She had lived on and used her experience to strengthen herself.

Katsuie had been born much more recently, but he had still trained and grown stronger in order to improve himself.

Even though he was of the combat type, his age was only a bit over one hundred. She had heard he had joined P.A. Oda in order to experience the intense fighting there, but if that was enough for him to move at the same time as her...

“Well done training yourself this far so quickly!”

“I’m not some stubborn spot on the ground, so don’t look down on me!”

A moment later, Tomoe realized she had stopped moving.

There was a single reason for this: ether light had wrapped around the silver shield attached to the right hand point on Katsuie’s back.

That was the Testamenta Arma named Animus Caritas – Novum and she knew what it did when activated.

...It interferes with any attack or defense made in combat and stops them for just an instant!

No, she thought. This isn’t “stopping” them.

It adds a moment of hesitation.

It was a feeling of not wanting to crush your opponent or of wanting to see how much they had grown. It was like the look of charity a parent gives to a child.

Of course, what was charity to a family member was nothing but danger to an

enemy, but...

...Well done!

Their speed was equal, but he still did not hold back. This was not an ideal challenge of blades meant to compare their pure skill because all else was equal.

This was a method used purely to win a fight.

“Are these the principles you learned from Nobunaga!?”

“That’s too complicated for me!”

Katsuie attacked with Kamewari with a magnificent smile on his face.

“Winning feels good! That’s all there is to it, you old hag!”

“Then I’m going to be feeling great!!”

Tomoe raised her voice as she turned her head and looked up into the sky.

“My Testament copies activate automatically to defend me!”

Three giant books had already been ejected into the air above her.

This spell activation was essentially a conditioned reflex and therefore not a conscious attack or defense, so how would Animus Caritas – Novum respond?

“That thing wasn’t made to battle something without a will of its own. It’s an idealist’s weapon!”

With those words, the three giant books struck Katsuie with three vertical blows.

Katsuie did not even have time to look up before the attacks hit his shoulders and head.

His legs were instantly embedded in the ground up to half the shin.

“Whoa!”

His shins tore into the dirt and he nearly fell to his knees, but...

“———!!”

He endured it. The strength filling his entire body caused him to heat up and

his sweat turned to steam, filling the surrounding air with heat.

He was fortunate he had not looked up or bent backwards. His forward bent back and neck had absorbed the impacts from above, so he was able to gather strength in the feet buried in the dirt.

“...!!”

He jumped up. The three giant books scattered into particles of light, but he did not bother looking at them.

“I hate books full of words!!”

Tomoe had yet to recover her movement. Having her initial movement forcibly stopped meant she had to prepare herself anew. Katsuie, of course, had to redo his own attack, but he could convert his standing motion into an attack and that gave him an advantage when it came to speed.

He decided to swing Kamewari as he stood up, but that was when Tomoe suddenly looked to his right and raised her eyebrows.

“Ah,” she said as if she had noticed something.

It's a feint, he thought. She's trying to distract me so she has a chance to attack.

...I'm not falling for that!

“Heh! What do you think you're doing, you stuuuupid old hag!? Die!!”

A shell flying in from the right collided with the right side of his face.

That was a close one, thought Tomoe. And I was the one that decided when and where the cannons would fire, so I really should have known exactly where they would be coming from.

However, she had completely forgotten about the cannons once Katsuie appeared and she had to deal with him. That was why she had reacted to the shell that flew in as if to remind her of their presence.

If her reaction had allowed Katsuie to notice the shell, it would have been her mistake.

Fortunately, the idiot had taken the full force of the blow, but...

“No damage!?”

His body swayed and his eyes were not quite focused, but strength filled his brow before long.

“Kh!”

He was coming to and forcing his body into motion.

He may have suffered a concussion because he started to collapse backwards, but Kamewari shot forward nonetheless. And it was a high-speed slash made from a snap of the wrist similar to throwing a slap.

Well done, she thought again. You are a combat-type demonic long-lived.

...So well done becoming so obsessed with combat!!

As soon as she prepared to intercept his attack, two things suddenly appeared in the air behind her: noise and light.

They came from above the city of Magdeburg near the park behind the cathedral.

...Directly above the transport ships!?

She looked back in shock and saw what was there.

An aerial ship had stabbed into Magdeburg’s sky.

It was a straight-line attack.

An aerial ship stood vertically at the very top of Magdeburg.

The three hundred meter ship showed no hesitation because it was unmanned.

A roar rang out and metal broke.

The defensive barrier surrounding Magdeburg glowed pure white and a flare of intense lightning appeared in the sky.

Naruze saw it as she fought Narimasa.

“They’re using an aerial ship as a battering ram!?”

The M.H.R.R. aerial warship was almost three hundred meters long, which put it at Kraken-class.

It had collided with the defensive barrier from directly above.

Despite the armor and solid structure of the warship, its length had shrunk by half. The crushed frame burst in the sky above and the broken parts scattered across the barrier like rain.

The barrier’s light looked dense enough to grab.

...That isn’t good!

The redirection type of barrier redirected any weight outwards, but the damage it could not redirect would accumulate and, if a weight constantly pressed down on it, the ether would gather and create the same phenomenon as a solid.

...That makes it easier to break, doesn’t it?

That thought was followed by something else.

“Another one!?”

Naruze thought a second ship had been dropped.

She thought a second body-slam had descended from the dark, cloudy sky.

But she was wrong.

She what had actually happened a moment later.

“A second *and* third ship!?”

Two simultaneous attacks showed themselves in Magdeburg’s sky.

They did nothing but continue their descent.

Righteousness and the Palais-Cardinal reacted to the weights falling from the sky.

“Not good!”

Righteousness saw that the evacuation transport ships had already begun to float. Wary of the enemy attacking and boarding them, they had prepared to get moving the instant it was time to escape, but that had half-covered them in water spray.

“Can you not land!? Then can you escape from the deck!?”

But the Palais-Cardinal stopped Righteousness from calling out to the ships.

“Don’t say that. Leaving the ship is exactly what the enemy wants. They fear that the various academy leaders will use the transport ships to escape to where they can’t reach them. That’s why they attacked from above.”

“Then...”

The transport ships were slowly beginning to move. They tilted to the west and slowly moved out of the way. That way, they could avoid the wreckage that would fall from above once the barrier was destroyed, but...

“There are more of them!?”

The second and third ships hit at supersonic speeds.

The sound arrived a moment later. What sounded like a heavier version of a slap shook the light of the barrier. The transport ships directly below were slow-moving and had yet to escape the range of the hits, so Righteousness took action.

“Sorry!”

She flew to the side of the westernmost transport ship.

She saw Guericke and the others on board gasping and she sent Righteousness’s right shoulder slamming into the ship carrying the Europeans.

She fully opened the flight devices on the god of war’s back and spread them like butterfly wings.

“...!”

She accelerated to get the transport ship away from the overhead attacks as soon as possible.

“That was a good decision, Satomi Yoshiyasu!”

The Palais-Cardinal arrived next to Righteousness.

“If the outside ship isn’t moved out of the way, the Far Eastern ship can’t move!”

Righteousness did not respond.

The two gods of war simply pressed against the transport ship and accelerated.

Naruze saw the entirety of Magdeburg lit up by a white dome.

However...

...The barrier is still holding up!!

The color white was focused on the area of sky where the aerial ships had hit. Their falling wreckage was stopped by the light and fell no further. Occasionally, wiper-like spell light would wash across the sky like a wave, but it had not been made to handle three objects as large as these ships. All it did was whip up the wind.

Naruze could not say they were safe.

She looked directly below the enemy ships stopped by the barrier above Magdeburg.

...The Maurice Cathedral and the evacuation ships containing Masazumi and the others are there!

The barrier could not be removed when it was being pressed on from above, but the evacuation ships were too close to the overhead dome to perform any major evasive maneuvers.

They had essentially been stopped where they were.

“Dammit!” shouted Narimasa as he ran along the wall. “It still hasn’t broken!?”

That told Naruze what the enemy was after. *It can’t be*, she began in her heart.

...Flooding the Elbe wasn’t meant to weaken the barrier so they could break

through the gate!?

It was not.

While attacking Narimasa, Naruze realized just why the enemy had flooded the Elbe River.

“Was it to make us think the city was dangerous and gather the leaders of the different nations in one place to evacuate them!? And then you could use warships as giant shells to take them all out at once!?”

The entire battle and the entire Sack had only been a way of gathering international leaders in one place and separating them from their bodyguard forces.

“You weren’t after the city or the history recreation at all! You were after the international leaders, weren’t you!?”

“Yup.” Narimasa threw stone toward her attacks while dodging them. “Once the international leaders had boarded their escape ships, we just had to attack the barrier above them enough to break through.”

He smashed the flying stone with his own fist and ran forward.

“Do you get it now?” he pointed at the light in the sky. “Then we crush their ships too! Of course, that’s not all we’re going to do here! But if they’re gonna gather together so conveniently, setting that as our goal is the logical thing to do!”

This is insane, thought Naruze. They flooded the Elbe, started such a large-scale invasion, and brought in so many powerful people, but it was all a diversion?

...No.

“You aren’t a diversion. ...If you’re going to do it, you’re going to do whatever you want. Is that it!?”

“Shaja. That’s right.” Narimasa re-combed his bangs as he ran. “We’ll flood the place and we’ll drop ships from the sky, but our master’s policy goes beyond that. If we can accomplish even more, then we’re free to do what we want.”

He laughed.

“If this had happened just a few hours ago, I could’ve killed that bastard Suleiman. Well, I guess I’ll have to put that one off until later.”

“———”

Naruze was left speechless for several moments.

...This is dangerous!

Those were their enemy’s tactics.

...So they put together a strategy and then allow their people to show off if they’ve already accomplished that.

Of course, it was probably only those with considerable strength that were allowed to do that, but some of them could indeed do it.

No, she thought. We have official positions too and the strength to pull that kind of thing off.

Nevertheless, they had entirely relied on their strategy and had not even thought about doing anything more.

“We were careless!!”

“Do you finally realize why people say P.A. Oda is so great!?”

Naruze mentally agreed with what he said as he ran, avoided her attacks, and made attacks of his own.

...They think about things on an entirely different level.

She became strongly aware of Nobunaga’s existence, but not because she was impressed. She had another thought in her heart.

“What a troublesome enemy!!”

“Then learn just how inadequate you are and die!!”

Narimasa made a stomp as he ran and a long stretch of the stone wall hopped up.

Naruze accelerated. Carelessly lowering her speed would get her hit by a scattershot of stone, so...

“Take this!”

She drew some reverse focus lines and the stone wall exploded out the other side.

Then the stone bullets arrived. The cluster of fragments flew her way, so she accelerated around them.

Or she tried to.

“Eh?”

This was not stone. Something longer flew through the air, blocking her way.

It was a large cannon.

...When did he do that!?

The answer was obvious. Narimasa had not sent the wall upwards with a powerful stomp in order to defend himself or gain the stone he needed to attack. He had done it to hide the cannon he was sending her way.

“!?”

She had accelerated to evade, so she could not avoid the cannon.

It collided with her as if catching on her right shoulder.

“———!”

She saw two things as her vision rotated.

First, Narimasa had kicked the wall's stone her way.

And second...

...The sky!

A fourth warship had fallen on the bright white defensive barrier.

Oh, no, she thought.

The barrier above the transport ships was already unable to redirect the weight pressing down on it, so it had solidified. A new rapid strike would mean one thing.

“It's going to break!?”

Tomoe sensed two dangers.

First, the falling warships were going to destroy Magdeburg's defensive barrier.

Second, the first danger had distracted her.

...And I was too slow to react to Kamewari!

She had been trying to avoid Kamewari, but...

“————”

Her movement had been briefly stopped by the Testamenta Arma and she had already used all of her reactionary defense spells.

Nothing she could do would make it in time.

She would of course take evasive action again, but the blade was still going to reach her just below the chest.

A moment later, she heard a female voice.

“Bind! Tonbokiri!!”

With the sound of shattering glass, the Testamenta Arma's power was cut.

As she accelerated and leaped along the path, Futayo saw Katsuie try to drive Kamewari into Tomoe as he avoided collapsing.

Past them, the battalion of M.H.R.R. mobile shells was beginning to climb the slope to slip past those two.

Futayo was worried about the enemy battalion, but the slash approaching Tomoe was more worrying.

Tomoe was trying to move back again, but Futayo decided that was not quite enough.

She moved to jump between them and to catch Kamewari on Tonbokiri.

“Oh?”

But she was moving too quickly and missed her chance to stop. She had been too distracted by predicting the damage to Tomoe.

Oh, no, she thought while acting on a certain solution.

She decided to make sure Katsuie would not cut down Tomoe.

“He’s going to hit you!”

She used the momentum of her dash to kick Tomoe out of the way.

Katsuie awoke in an instant.

...What!?

Something unbelievable was occurring before his eyes.

An idiot had just kicked Tomoe Gozen. Of course, he had been trying to cut her down.

“Clearly, you’re the one that was going to hit her!!”

However, kicking Tomoe Gozen had eaten up enough momentum for the girl to come to a stop. She took a quick step and turned to point both her eyes and spear tip toward him.

Sparks flew from Kamewari.

The girl, Musashi’s vice chancellor and the wielder of Tonbokiri, had deflected Kamewari.

“Interesting!!”

Katsuie straightened up, stood tall, and quickly moved forward.

He swung Kamewari to push Musashi’s vice chancellor down the path and toward the city.

“But what do you hope to accomplish!?”

He smiled and jerked his chin toward the sky.

“The final warship is already falling!!”

The fourth warship was coming.

It was on a direct vertical course for Magdeburg and the transport ships below.

“Everyone but the crew get up on the deck to prepare for the barrier breaking!”

Masazumi and the other Musashi passengers frantically moved through the Far Eastern ship which was the central of the three transport ships. They were all rushing through the narrow corridor.

“Hey, hey. Asama, are you really not going to let go of my hand? Are you going to marry me or something? In fact, if those things are falling from above, can’t you do your *fwoosh* and make them go *boom* to make everything nice and *boing*?”

“I’m not sure how to respond to that... But since I’ve been working against M.H.R.R.’s divine transmission jamming, I’ve used almost half of my internal Blessings. There are three ships up above, but I would probably only be able to destroy one of them.”

“*Only* one?”

The others looked at Asama in consternation, but she ignored them. Everyone had their own standards, so she decided to change the subject.

“A-anyway, is everyone here? There’s Masazumi and Kimi and...um... Where’s Adele?”

Flat Vassal: “Oh, I’m here. I’m here, okay?”

Asama: “Are you already on the deck? That was fast.”

Flat Vassal: “Eh? No, um, I’m still inside. I’m a little busy is all.”

Vice President: “Hm? Are you working on something? Or are you carrying something?”

Flat Vassal: “No, um... To put it nicely, I’m, uh, in the restroom. You know how when you’ve been really tense, it sometimes hits you all of a sudden after you relax? Anyway, since we were about to leave on the ship, I – ah ha ha – thought this would be my best chance. You know what that’s like, right?”

ANA: “Come to think of it, I haven’t had to worry about that since combining with the god of war.”

Dragon Dog: “Milady, I have determined that is not necessary for you.”

Righteousness: “Well, now that you mention it, I don’t have to worry about that when I’m combined either.”

Flat Vassal: “Ah... That must be nice. The mobile shell isn’t that convenient... And another thing, everyone.”

“What is it?” asked Asama as she and the others tilted their heads while evacuating to the deck.

Flat Vassal: “You know the – to put it indirectly – health screening we do before the school trip? The sample we have to give? That’s coming up soon, isn’t it?”

Almost Everyone: “Oh, no!”

Asama: “A-anyway, warriors use that kind of set during their detailed medical testing after their battles, right!? There should be some on this ship, so you can use those instead after the battle! And once you finish your ‘battle’, Adele, hurry to the deck!”

Flat Vassal: “Please stop piling on the pressure like thaaaaat!”

As soon as Adele’s typed-out shout reached them, a voice was broadcast throughout the ship.

“The fourth ship is coming from directly above!!”

With a roar of destruction, Magdeburg lost its ceiling of light.

The defensive barrier had shattered.

An instant of bursting and wind sent the fragments down like a blizzard, but directly below...

“The water!”

The loss of the barrier allowed the flooded Elbe to assault Magdeburg like a five meter tsunami.

Something similar happened to the wreckage of the four warships supported by the barrier above the park behind the Maurice Cathedral.

“Are they coming!?”

They fell. It began slow, but they began to accelerate a moment later.

“Here they come!!”

Despite their damage, the warship wreckage was still almost one hundred meters long and they fell quickly toward the three transport ships lined up below.


The wind roared, surging waves pressed in on and struck the city, and a great din fell from the sky.

It all brought destruction.

Chapter 78: Advancer of the Age

CHAPTER 78

"Advancer of the Age"



Is that a knock on the door?
Or is it a battering ram hammer?
Point Allocation (How to Open the Door)

Is that a knock on the door?

Or is it a battering ram hammer?

Point Allocation (How to Open the Door)

Metal fell from low in the sky.

A total of four ship's worth of wreckage descended toward Magdeburg once the support of the defensive barrier was lost.

They intertwined as they fell straight toward three transport ships.

Two gods of war were pushing on the westernmost one from the side and it was possible the falling wreckage would only catch the back end of it, but the other two ships had not escaped in time.

The central ship holding the Far Easterners was the biggest problem. It was positioned at the very center of the four falling ships and its passengers spoke from the deck.

"Heh heh. I thought I could just jump down from the deck, but that's surprisingly big! It's over! My wise life is over! We're going to be crushed so flat you won't be able to tell me and the huge-breasted shrine maiden apart! Danke schööööön!! Come on, Adele! Quit adjusting your inner suit's butt and get over here! Your corpse can fuse with some giant breasts! This is just like the sphinx's riddle! What is flat-chested in the morning, flat-chested in the afternoon, and a corpse at night!? Man! That is what it means to be human!"

"Wh-what are you talking about, Kimi? ...Ah, we might really be in trouble! Oh, no. I have three porn games to test in my bag! If I die and they find those in my possession, they'll definitely think I was weird! They'll say the daughter of the Asama family was a porn reviewer who brought porn games onto the battlefield!"

"Um, personally, I think both of you should calm down."

Meanwhile, the four falling ships picked up speed.

They were leaking ether fuel and trailing white light, so everyone gave a shout at that approaching pressure.

“We’re done forrrrrrrrr!!”

When she heard Kimi and the others give their proclamation of doom, Yoshiyasu looked back while pushing the other transport ship with Righteousness.

That group was always saying crazy things, but...

...Can I make it in time!?

If she flew over now, she could save two or three of those on the deck, so she considered doing so.

But then she noticed something racing through the air.

It was mist.

The thin transformation of rain raced through the night sky in a straight horizontal line.

“———”

She heard a cry.

This was not the howling of a dog. It was the roar indicating the beginning of a battle.

Then the sky split apart. Burning along the line of mist, a transparent shimmering line flew through the sky.

Yoshiyasu realized all sound had vanished and Righteousness picked up a voice that seemed to rebuke that silence. It was a familiar male voice.

“Weep, Murasamemaru.”

The night sky exploded and wept.

A ripping voice pursued the mist and the following scorch mark.

The rain of mist dispersed and a slice covering about a kilometer and a half was established. The clouds and mists of a rain shower followed.

“———”

The falling wreckage of the four warships was torn through and destroyed in the night sky.

It broke down the center and scattered to either side, so one half fell next to the Far Eastern transport ship and the other half fell next to the transport ship carrying the hemispheres. The hemisphere ship had the armor of one side torn away and was thrown off balance, but it gently moved to maintain its position.

They were all safe.

The wind whipped up and the falling objects sounded like splitting pots when they struck the ground.

However, that was the end of it.

All that remained was a white god of war in the distant sky.

Righteousness flew up into the Magdeburg sky and spoke the name of the heavy god of war that had used both hands to swing down the spirit sword and gunblade named Murasamemaru.

“Yatsufusa!?”

Naruze had been stopped in midair.

A counterattack using a flying cannon had hit her in the right shoulder and she had been sent into a pathetic spiral. Her enemy used that chance to send a stone scattershot her way and she was certain at least three pieces of stone were going to hit her.

She decided to at least protect her dominant arm and her hands. Also her face. *That much should be more than enough for the rest of my life*, she thought while putting up her guard.

However...

“!?”

The attack that hit her was soft, warm, and wrapped in a familiar scent.

“Margot!?”

“Bingo.”

The voice confirmed it for Naruze and she found herself held in the other girl's arms high in the sky.

They were about twenty meters above the wall, but the heated wind was rising toward them and they could see everything happening around Magdeburg.

Naruze knew what she had to check on first.

"The transport ships!"

Those ships were behind the cathedral, but all she saw was Kimi swinging Asama around in a celebratory dance on the middle ship's deck. In other words, everything was normal.

And if Margot was holding her...

"Our stupid chancellor's group is back?"

"Judge, judge. That's what I was on my way to tell you all. We still can't use the divine transmission, so I thought it would be best to tell you directly. Tenzou and Ma-yan are running this way, too. Also..."

Margot looked to the west.

A powerful charge was arriving from the western hill.

"Is that...?"

She had seen this before. Just the day before yesterday, they had clashed in IZUMO.

"Hexagone Française!!"

"Vive le XIV!!"

Hexagone Française's *Lourd de Marionnette* unit led the charge.

They were approximately two kilometers out. They ran from the hilltop in order to rout M.H.R.R.'s rear guard waiting outside Magdeburg. The commander's *Lourd de Marionnette* had been lightened to help him run, he held a siege spear in his right hand, and he spoke from his voice device.

"Hurry! The previous chancellor is waiting inside the flooded city!"

They all knew that Anne of Austria had little life left, so...

“Hurry!”

The second in command raised his spear so the academy flag tied to it could be seen far and wide. It was embroidered with the emblems of Hexagone Française and Ecole de Paris.

“Vive le XIV!!”

They raised their weapons.

“Vive la Anne!!”

“Vive la Moooooouri!!”

“Viveeee laaaaaa....”

They all breathed in and raised their voices so they could be heard at their destination.

“Vive la Hexagone Française!!”

Shouts of “tes” and “testament” were made.

“Hurry! Our *Lourd de Marionnette* unit is a glorious unit created by the previous chancellor in negotiations with the other nations!”

“Let them see us charge!”

They were followed by the *Belle de Marionnette* royal guards led by the Three Musketeers. Just like the *Lourd de Marionnette* unit, they raced quickly down the hill toward Magdeburg.

They ran.

They kicked up the dirt to pick up even more speed. Behind them, a man and woman were protected by the *Belle de Marionnettes* of the rear guard.

The pair was Louis Exiv and Mouri Terumoto.

Exiv silently watched the charge with his eyebrows raised a little. Terumoto spoke to him while looking in the same direction he was.

“Can you see her?”

“No.”

He shook his head and started to say something else.

“———”

But he held his tongue. Terumoto responded by grabbing his hand and holding it tight.

“Don’t worry.” She breathed in. “The Roi-Soleil’s sister is the goddess of the moon. The moon may not have shown itself yet on this cloudy night, but the sky will clear up before long. After all...”

A great roar seemed to answer her. High in the center of the sky, the air shook and a tremor reached as far down as the ground. Mouri-01 explained why from behind the two of them.

“Here they come!”

The sky split apart and something broke through the dark clouds and dropped down like a hammer.

“There are eight of them! It’s the Musashi! And...they are standing up vertically and descending!!”

“There...it is!!”

Inside Musashino’s bridge, Suzu stood from her seat and began reconstructing the model of the Musashi and Magdeburg’s surroundings.

The quick movements of her hands expanded the model and created the city’s broken gate and wall. The indicated water level on the ship’s outer hull quickly rose and the shapes of the falling ships were made anew.

However, there was one thing they could not afford to forget.

“Resist...it!”

Each of the Musashi’s ships was lined up and rapidly falling with its stern pointed down. To “fire” themselves along a ballistic course using a vertical launch of their gravitational cruising, they had only controlled their acceleration without performing any course corrections or braking.

That meant the Musashi’s ships were much like giant shells and they had to

prevent them from colliding with the surface.

“Suzu-sama, we have finished turning each ship toward the sky as we fall. We will now perform full speed gravitational acceleration toward the heavens in order to brake. Over!!”

Just as “Musashino” had said, the Musashi turned toward the sky and accelerated to keep itself from falling to the earth.

For the turn, they had referenced the vertical loop from the Armada battle. The action itself was possible, but the structure of the ship did not allow for it.

That placed intense stress on the Musashi.

The ship’s own weight pulled down on it and caused the main frame and each block to groan.

“Musashi” was the one who responded to all that stress and weight.

“I am distributing my authority to each individual ship. Please remove your ship’s stress in preparation for the full-power re-acceleration. Over.”

Suzu sensed each ship shaking in response.

“It’s...flowing?”

She felt a distinct current.

First, ether for reinforcement spells was injected into the wide and long blocks to the stern of the ships.

Then, the automatons in charge of the ships gradually corrected the maximum movable range of the frames supporting each block.

On top of that, an automaton measuring the pressure on the stern of the ships spoke to “Musashi”.

“Draining the water from the stern reservoir blocks to remove the weight! Over!!”

Once they had permission for that, clouds wrapped around each of the Musashi’s ships. When the water drained from the stern contacted the cold air and the air currents rising from the Magdeburg battlefield, it instantly created flowing clouds.

The Musashi looked like eight pillars standing atop the clouds, but Suzu smiled.

“We...stopped!!”

She breathed in.

“Thank...you!”

“Judge!! Over.”

Every automaton on the bridge responded and “Musashi” waved her hand.

“Continue exchanging information with individualized control of each ship. As soon as we gather and collect the vice president’s group and the chancellor’s group, we will leave this airspace! Over.”

Two gazes viewed the eight pillars standing in the sky and the expanse of clouds supporting them. They belonged to the Palais-Cardinal which had lowered to the surface and Anne who stood on its shoulder.

“Wow. Do you see that, Luynes? The temple of the gods is descending from the sky.”

“That is an image of Greek mythology commonly painted during the Renaissance, isn’t it? The composition and structure is similar, but I have determined it is a coincidence, milady.”

“You’re always so realistic, Luynes.”

“I apologize, but we are still on the battlefield.”

“That’s true,” agreed Anne.

The three transport ships floated overhead and the European one slowly turned northward in order to face west where Hexagone Française was.

However, the Far Eastern ship had yet to move.

“Musashi’s chancellor hasn’t shown up yet, has he?”

“It seems one of his traveling companions has already arrived at the city’s wall, so I have determined he is currently passing through the battle between Hexagone Française and M.H.R.R.”

“Their 1st special duty officer is a ninja, right? He should be good at that.”

Once she said that, a familiar face appeared over the edge of the central transport ship’s deck as all three of them slowly ascended. It was Musashi’s vice president.

She bowed and waved as two diplomatic ships descended from the Musashi as bodyguards. The Musashi was generally unarmed, but these had thick decorated armor.

They likely intended to return to the Musashi while protected by those ships.

...They’re a lively group, but this is goodbye.

However, Magdeburg was still a combat zone.

Anne had heard that Narimasa’s lightly-equipped unit was fighting by the western wall and that Katsuie’s group was fighting on the flooded city’s rooftops to the east.

However, the battle was already over and their destinations were in sight.

After retreating, Guericke and the others would likely work to restore Magdeburg since it escaped with only a flood.

“And Musashi will continue on to Qing-Takeda. Everyone will go where they need to go. I wonder if Matsunaga is watching this commotion from inside the Shigisan?”

“Do you think Lord Suleiman is with him?”

“Who knows.” Anne sighed. “At any rate, this completes the history recreation of the Sack of Magdeburg and starts M.H.R.R. toward their defeat in the Thirty Years’ War,” she said. “We managed to advance the age once more.”

As soon as she finished speaking, the Palais-Cardinal fell to one knee.

Anne felt a chill.

It was a lot like the chill she had felt before. It had felt like she was holding it in check, but...

Dragon Dog: “Milady!!”

ANA: “Don’t worry. I haven’t vanished yet. If I’m feeling cold, it’s because I’m still warm.”

She was glad her kneeling position allowed her to look down at the city.

ANA: “It looks like I’m waiting for my brother to show up.”

Dragon Dog: “I will contact the Musashi’s gunner shrine maiden up above! She can break through the jamming and connect a divine transmission to Hexagone Française!”

ANA: “No need, Luynes. If we did that, it would set my brother up for failure.”

Dragon Dog: “For failure?”

“Yes,” she replied.

ANA: “He wouldn’t make it in time.”

I can tell.

ANA: “These are the people continuing on to the age I advanced, so show me what they are doing.”

Dragon Dog: “Milady, I have one piece of advice.”

ANA: “What is it?”

Dragon Dog: “Testament. Just before you pass away, primary control of this body will be returned to me.”

ANA: “Now that you mention it, that’s right. My superior setting can only be removed when I am in a critical state.”

Luynes continued from there.

Dragon Dog: “So when that happens, please only blame me for whatever action I take.”

Anne knew Luynes would try to go to her brother.

ANA: “Thank you.”

Dragon Dog: “You should not thank a maid for her disobedience.”

“That’s not it,” said Anne.

ANA: “Historically, Lady Luynes was Anne of Austria’s eternal friend.”

Dragon Dog: “Eternal is such a perfect way of putting it.”

ANA: “Yes, and it suits you.”

With her hips still lowered, Anne took a breath. She closed her eyes and the surrounding sound reached her auditory devices. From her surroundings, she heard the battlefield noises and countless shouts, but from the overhead transport ships, she heard the words of those waiting for their classmates as they tried to soften the harsh atmosphere.

Yes, she thought. No one is watching me right now except for Luynes.

But...

...This may be a first.

I’ve never been anywhere so calm.

She spoke some quiet words.

“God.”

She closed her eyes on the battlefield below the pillars floating in the sky.

“Did I fulfill my role?”

Mitotsudaira was riding something that swayed gently.

It was a wave.

It was a faint rocking motion that gently bent her body and enveloped her breathing and pulse. She just about let herself fully sink into that wave, but...

“Nn...”

An old memory returned to her as she dozed.

It was from a long time ago, before she had even gone to Musashi.

One day, she had left on a “trip”.

She had wanted to visit the candy house her mother told her stories of, but her parents would always exchange a glance and tell her she could not. That was

why she had headed into the forest alone.

Now, she knew that forest was nowhere near her mother's forest. Her mother and father had likely moved far away to hide the fact that her mother was the Reine des Garous.

It had been a smaller, thinner forest than her mother's, but it had still been deep enough for a child to get lost in. The first hour had been fun, but...

...All of the animals ran away from me.

In the picture books she had read, the forest animals had all been so kind and had helped people who were lost.

As the sun began to set, she had sat below a big tree and cried.

She had known no one was coming to help her.

After all, all of the people near their mansion – even the ones her own age – kept their distance when she tried to play with them.

She was from a Loup-Garou family. She doubted the people had known her mother was the Reine des Garous, but...

...Being from a man-eating family was enough to be feared.

When she had entered the forest, she had assumed the animals would help her, even if the people would not.

But they had not.

She had not told anyone about her “trip” because she had been afraid they would stop her.

She had been afraid they would tell her the candy house was not there.

And in the end, nothing had approached her or come to help her.

She had eventually worn herself out crying, given up, curled up on the ground below the tree, and gone to sleep. The next thing she had known, she was riding a wave.

That wave had been her mother's back.

She remembered the surprise when she had woken, but she also remembered

the stars and moonlight between the branches overhead and she remembered the chill and stillness of the night.

She also remembered what she had said.

“Mamma, you’re amazing...”

Had she thought her mother had brought her to see that sight? Or had she been thankful her mother had found her so easily? She still was not sure.

But she did know what her mother had said while adjusting her position on her back.

“You can visit the candy house once you grow up, okay? As a child, you’ll get cavities.”

“I won’t get any if I grow up?”

“Testament. You will not.”

“But,” her young self had asked. “I can’t grow up if I don’t eat people, can I? That’s what everyone says.”

“Do you not want to eat people?”

She had nodded and her mother had laughed.

“Don’t worry. It isn’t when they eat someone that a Loup-Garou grows up.”

“Then when is it?”

“Testament. It is when they decide they don’t want to eat that person.”

She had tilted her head and wondered if that time would come for her and if she would find someone like that.

She remembered the still darkness, the moon, and the stars of that day, and they all remained in the depths of her memory.

“———”

She opened her eyes.

This time, she did not find a still night.

There were clouds in the sky that shook with a mixture of shellfire, clashing metal, cries of anger, and shouting.

“...!?”

But she did find the chilly night air and her mother’s back.

Mitotsudaira was positioned between her mother’s back and her mother’s hair that enveloped her. Her mother looked over her shoulder to see her.

The woman stood on a hill bordering the forest and they overlooked the plain and city that made up the battlefield. Below the hill, several gods of war and countless mobile shells were crossing paths to take up their positions. She looked to the city by the river and found its gate and wall were broken, it was widely flooded, and it had sparks and scarlet flames rising from quite a few places.

However...

“The Musashi is here?”

Her mother stopped moving and she seemed to be asking for confirmation. The woman removed the arms supporting the back of her knees and her butt, so she stood on the ground herself.

The firmness of the ground below her feet and the leaving warmth of her mother in front of her brought back an awareness of her own body.

...Yes.

The slight warmth of waking filled her body, but she could gather her strength if she needed. Most likely, Mary had healed her as she slept. The scent of medicinal plants coming from different parts of her body was enough to confirm it. And...

“Oh? Why am I wearing my usual clothes?”

She looked to her mother who faced her with a smile and a hand on her cheek.

“D-don’t tell me!”

“Heh heh. We all had a clothes-changing party together.”

She noticed her mother was wearing the combat dress based on the Hexagone Française uniform that she had worn in IZUMO.

“But I had the gentlemen leave, so don’t worry. And Nate, you still get so ticklish when I change you that you curl up. You haven’t changed at all.”

“W-wait, mother! That’s a physical leak of private information!”

“What are you talking about? Now that it’s been shared, it isn’t private information anymore.”

“Y-you are the worst! That convenient logic is the worst!!”

“Calm down.” Her mother took a short breath. “Now, then. The situation has changed quite a bit.”

The Reine des Garous recalled the information in the letter a night bird had brought her a while ago. The letter had included certification of its veracity.

...Anne has given a few instructions after negotiating with Musashi.

One of those instructions was most important.

“Hexagone Française has agreed to a ceasefire with Musashi and...Louis Exiv and Mouri Terumoto will seek a friendly relationship with Musashi.”

She indicated the battle behind her.

“This situation is the proof of that.”

“You mean it isn’t just an agreement? It’s a pseudo-alliance proven by their actions? And the friendly relationship isn’t with Hexagone Française but with its chancellor and student council president?”

“Testament.”

The Reine des Garous smiled at how sensitive to words her daughter had become. That may have been thanks to her life in Musashi and its complicated situation.

However...

“These were Anne’s instructions, so Musashi is going to be friendly to our chancellor and student council president even if I have to force it.”

The Reine des Garous realized one thing that meant.

...Anne may have been worried about us.

Although perhaps I'm being selfish and imagining it, she thought while saying more to her daughter.

"Cooperate with the future that Anne has left with Hexagone Française, Nate. Friendship between Musashi and Hexagone Française's rulers is what she wanted."

However...

"You have yet to prove yourself."

"You mean...?"

"Testament." The Reine des Garous nodded. "Musashi and Hexagone Française are to be equals. For that to be the case, Musashi must have someone as powerful as me. ...Of course, what is expected of a vice chancellor like me is different from what is expected of a 5th special duty officer like you."

But...

"What do you want to be as the one who serves by her king's side?"

Her daughter gave a clear reaction to that question: she stopped moving.

She did not squirm, flee, or step back.

"———"

She looked her mother straight in the eye.

...Yes.

Good, thought the Reine des Garous.

I'm so glad I have a daughter who doesn't run away from me.

She spread her legs a bit and looked her opponent right back in the eye.

"I will give you one minute. Come at me with everything you have, Nate. And if I cannot see anything there and you are only an inferior copy of me..."

"You will slam me against the ground, rob me of all defiance, and take me back to Hexagone Française?"

"Testament. Someone less useful than me will not be of any use to Hexagone

Française and Musashi in the future. After all, having me would be enough. So if that happens...”

She strengthened her gaze. Instead of just looking, she stared down her daughter.

“Yes. I will remove you from that place where no one needs you and I will take you back home.”

After accepting her mother’s words, Mitotsudaira started by breathing in.

...She is my enemy.

This woman was family, but also an enemy. After all...

...She is trying to take everything from me.

If she lost to her mother, she would lose more than just her social status and home. She would lose her will and her pride and her entire being would be torn down by the fact that there was something she could not stand up to. The more she resisted, the stronger the power restraining her would grow, so...

“Are you saying it is possible this could lead to my death?”

“If you are stubborn enough, then I may respond accordingly.”

She would not be allowed to keep any hint of resistance.

“You are asking for absolute obedience, aren’t you?”

“Heh heh. That is exactly what a parent wants from a child who has yet to grow up but tries to act like an adult. So Nate, if you want to claim that isn’t what you are, then show me what you have gained.”



She had a single task.

“Prove that you are my equal.”

Mitotsudaira nodded.

She faced her mother from a distance of five meters.

There was currently a battlefield on the earth and eight ship pillars in the sky.

All of that decorated the stage as she breathed in the night air once more.

It was chilly.

That was now the only part of the past unchanged. Not even her mother's back remained, but...

“I may not have fully grown up yet, but I will show you what I have gained.”

With those words, both of them produced instantaneous motion.

The battle between wolves began atop the hill where no one was watching.

The hill bordered the forest, but it was mostly the hard earth of a wasteland. The hilltop was entirely flat and there was nothing to hide behind.

In this location, everything would be decided by their speed, strength, and skill at positioning themselves.

The battle tilted hard in one direction as soon as it began.

The first thing they did was launch themselves toward each other.

They made high-speed jumps.

Mitotsudaira had the greater initial speed.

She approached with two instantaneous dashes as if snapping her body forward. She kept her body low, swung herself to the left as a feint, and then jumped toward her opponent's left side.

Her mother was right-handed, so she would go to her left. She was right-handed as well, but she would have the upper hand as the initiator. She thrust her left elbow forward and sent her right hand's nails racing along above it.

The two of them were going to collide, so the counter effect would give her attack more power. She had no complaints with this as a first move.

However, her mother vanished at the instant of impact.

No, she was there, but she was two meters ahead.

...She sent herself backwards!?

The woman had jumped backwards. It was only a distance of two meters, but it threw off the timing of Mitotsudaira's attack and removed her from Mitotsudaira's focused gaze. She might as well have jumped outside of Mitotsudaira's perception.

"Do you remember when I jumped into the spring?"

She did. Her mother had jumped in from above, but she had entered the water without any kind of splash.

Her mother had done so by shifting her weight and swinging her entire body. She understood that now that she could do the same thing, even if only at a more basic level.

However, she could now plainly see the overwhelming difference between herself and her mother.

The woman's breasts were completely different. Not to mention how they swayed.

"M-mother! Can you at least wear a bra!? That's criminal!"

"But they make my shoulders all stiff."

Her mother immediately launched an attack.

She attacked with her right arm while extending her body to fill the two meter gap between them.

"Kh."

Mitotsudaira snapped her arms downward in order to dodge.

She sank down, but her mother leaned her outstretched body forward to lower herself as well.

...She really knows how to ad-lib!"

Mitotsudaira exhaled and got down on her hands and knees.

Immediately afterwards, the wind of her mother's passing nails brushed across the top of her head.

Her mother had just finished swinging her right arm with her body stretched forward, but Mitotsudaira had lowered her hips into a crawling pose and could not attack.

That was why Mitotsudaira snapped her ankle forward.

She kicked forward on the ground with just her toes to make a short leap backwards.

She strongly thrust her hips backwards to keep her balance and pulled back on her entire body for a singular purpose.

...To evade!

She fell back.

She instantly created a gap of one meter, securing her safety in the process.

...Now I attack!

As soon as she thought that, the color silver circled around in front of her.

She was seeing the color of her mother's hair and back.

Her mother had instantly filled the gap and taken action before Mitotsudaira could.

Her mother's attacks did not stop.

...She's fast!

After Mitotsudaira had leaped backwards, her mother had pulled back her right arm and performed a spin while facing backwards. Her open left hand sent out a backhand blow using the sharp nails.

"...!"

Her mother snapped her feet toward Mitotsudaira while rotating. The tall

woman leaped toward her as if turning to face her. And all the while, she was spinning very quickly.

Also, her left backhand flew towards Mitotsudaira.

Meanwhile, Mitotsudaira's legs were outstretched from her short dash backwards. Her hips were pulled back, her lowered body was bent forward, and her arms were lowered.

With all of her limbs outstretched, she could not gain the flexibility she needed to snap her body in one direction or another.

...Oh, no!

This was what it meant to be inexperienced. She had not prepared herself to make her snapping motions in quick succession.

However...

“———”

She made a split-second decision.

She used her lowered left arm to clutch the back of her left thigh which was stretched forward.

“Nn.”

She used all of her strength to swing up her bent body.

Her backwards-swinging head pulled back on her back muscles and her left hand pulled her left leg backwards.

Lifting her body up from the left side caused her to rotate to the right.

This made her roll to the right in midair.

It was a compact side-flip that placed her face-down to the ground, but she had indeed shifted one spot to the right.

And...

“Oh?”

Her mother's nails pierced straight through the spot she had vacated.

The blow looked powerful enough to tear through both flesh and bone.

Wind blew, her mother landed from her high-speed spin, and the woman turned left to face Mitotsudaira who had landed in a face-down position.

They were very close together.

Her mother's left hand was thrust over Mitotsudaira's head and Mitotsudaira snapped her bent elbows to get up.

...Here I go!

Given their positions, her mother had the advantage here, but she could jab her left elbow into her mother's left side as she stood up.

Her mother could not intercept her because the woman's left arm was still held out over her head.

...Here goes!

Her mother started to pull back her body, but it was too late.

Mitotsudaira began to snap her body up as if lifting her head so she could swing her left elbow around.

"...Eh?"

But she could not stand.

Something sat on her hair as if it had grabbed her head.

It was her mother's left hand.

The hand held out over her head had spread its fingers and grabbed the back of her head.

As she tried to move, Mitotsudaira realized what had happened.

When her mother had pulled back for just an instant earlier, she had not been trying to back away.

...She was positioning her outstretched hand directly over my head!?

She also realized that her mother's arm contained no strength whatsoever as it held the back of her head.

The trick to a Loup-Garou's acceleration was not to use any unnecessary

strength. Instead...

...You instantly bend your body and store your strength.

Her mother's outstretched arm was bending as it held down her rising head.

It was becoming more flexible.

The Reine des Garous held her daughter's head as if stroking it.

Her fingers were spread at the end of her outstretched left arm. Normally, she could not bend her arm in this position and therefore could not gain the initial speed needed for an attack.

However...

"Nate, you need to watch out before lifting your head."

The motion of her daughter getting up had pushed her left arm up.

Her arm bent and built up the speed she needed.

She did it all using her daughter's actions, so she smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

"It's too bad, Nate."

She immediately snapped her left elbow downward with all of her strength. She lowered it straight down.

"When you were little, you had a habit of curling up face-down and crying like a small animal. You were doing that when I found you lost in the forest that one time. In other words, whenever something unpleasant happens..."

She did it all at once.

"You hide the outside world from yourself to feel safe."

The Reine des Garous slammed her daughter's face straight down toward the dimly-lit ground.

Mitotsudaira felt a sense of resignation in the instant she was slammed toward the ground.

Her enemy was simply too skilled. The woman had used the hand from her failed attack to hold down her head, and...

...She used my movement to build up her strength!

The fact that it was all played by ear was the biggest shock of all. Her mother had completely outdone her.

Not only that, but she could not match her mother's maneuverability any more than her cleverness.

Mitotsudaira used a Loup-Garou's acceleration for her movement and attacks, but her mother could decide in a split-second to use it for her movement, attacks, or defense. And instead of using pure acceleration, she would create more complex movements or reversals.

That was the difference created by experience and training.

To her mother, it had to look like a child playfully using it for short movements and attacks, but as the parent, she did not hold back.

As Mitotsudaira's mother had said, she would lie face-down whenever she cried or felt lonely.

She also realized something else about that position curled up on the ground.

...It's the same position as when my mother carries me on her back.

In that case, she thought.

In her memory of waking up that one time, she had been on her mother's back, but what about now that she had left her parents and gone to Musashi?

Was she the same as when she had gotten lost in the forest?

...Have I never once lifted my head?

As soon as she asked herself that, the answer reached her.

"———!"

I have, she thought as she began to move.

The Reine des Garous noticed movement in her left hand.

She had tried to slam her daughter's head down with that hand, but the nails of a hand shot up toward it from the right.

This was the left hand her daughter had tried to send into her left side earlier. The hand snapped up and accelerated.

...My wrist!?

As soon as she realized the girl had grabbed her wrist, the Reine des Garous was pulled by her own left hand.

"!?" She rotated around in midair.

She swallowed her slight surprise and kicked off the ground to accelerate her body's rotation.

Her daughter had used the rotation to escape being slammed to the ground.

"..."

She stopped herself just before hitting the ground and used the reactionary force to snap her entire body to the left.

The Reine des Garous landed and her daughter got up. The mother caught her breath and the daughter inhaled deeply.

"————"

The Reine des Garous once more sent a powerful look toward her daughter.

...That's right.

Mitotsudaira filled her body with air to calm herself.

...I have more than what I gained from my mother.

She had just used one of those things. It was technique to throw an unbalanced opponent that Naomasa had taught her in England.

"That's...right."

I probably have something, she told herself.

She was not sure how to put it, but a lot had happened since she had arrived at Musashi.

A lot of it had been worthless and she was aware she had been the victim a lot of the time, but one thing was for certain.

“I...will not give up.”

“I can’t recommend that line of thinking. When you are hopelessly outmatched, sometimes death is the only possible outcome.”

“But, mother. What if the friendship between Hexagone Française and Musashi were to break down and my king and the others became your enemy. What would you do then?”

“Well.” Her mother placed a hand on her cheek. “Couldn’t I just go try to eat him again?”

That settled it. She definitely had something that she had not in the past.

She had something to protect.

So she shook her body up and down just once and relaxed her limbs. She made sure she could move any part of her body in a snapping leap at a moment’s notice.

“It is a knight’s duty to protect her king and queen.”

“That is my duty as well, you know?”

Mitotsudaira nodded and took a step forward.

As she raised her head again, she felt she was different than in the past.

“—————”

She snapped her body and began the fight anew.

Chapter 79: Wolf at the Site of the Promise

CHAPTER 79

"Wolf at the Site of the Promise"



What did
The knight rely on
Back then?

Point Allocation (Loyalty)

What did

The knight rely on

Back then?

Point Allocation (Loyalty)

“Mitotsudaira is fighting her mother?”

Masazumi frowned on the transport ship’s deck and asked that question of Asama.

A pre-prepared divine mail had arrived from Naito who was battling Narimasa with Naruze. It provided the route Toori’s group was using, and...

“It says, ‘When we were stripping Mito-tsan and doing a variety of things to her, it ignited maman’s maternal instincts and she started asking if I knew any curses to make boobs grow, but to make a long story short, I think Adele would be first in line for that and maman will decide whether to release Mito-tsan after “testing” her.’ ”

“Messages like that have started making sense to me lately. Do you think that means I’m heading down the wrong path as a politician?”

...Huh? But it makes perfect sense to me!

Despite that thought, Asama simply smiled and ignored the comment.

She then spoke to Masazumi while thinking back to the past.

“This is going to be their third battle, isn’t it?”

“The second one was back at IZUMO, right? Then was the first one...?”

“Yes.”

As Asama nodded in agreement, Kimi looked west from the edge of the deck as if searching for something. She stared outside of Magdeburg to the flat battlefield and the hill beyond it and she slowly opened her mouth.

“How should I put it? Was it eight years ago? My foolish brother and I didn’t know about it because we were at our grandmother’s house, but apparently the

same thing happened at Bizen IZUMO.”

“Can I ask why?”

“Well,” said Asama as she looked to Kimi who nodded.

“I would like to know that, too. Even if it’s a little late to be asking.”

After all...

“If Mitotsudaira can defeat the Reine des Garous and arrive here, it will mean she has swept away her past from eight years ago. So can you tell us what happened then?”

“Well.” Asama breathed out. “Mito...tried to leave Musashi.”

“Lady Mitotsudaira did?”

Tenzou was traveling with Mary and Toori behind the supply station of the M.H.R.R. siege troops. They could hear the battlefield, but they were not actually on the battlefield.

Given the topic, Tenzou was using a ninja technique and Mary was using a spirit spell so they could converse without Toori hearing. Tenzou felt awkward going behind Toori’s back like that, but...

...Toori-dono...

The crossdressing idiot was slipping in and out of the warrior camp built alongside the supply station. And each time...

“Look, Tenzou! They’ve got Western stuff! This is German-style 18+ material! It’s a treasure trove of everything from magazines to games!”

“When they return to camp, I bet the M.H.R.R. warriors will be shocked to find only their pornographic possessions have vanished...”

“? Master Tenzou, what does he meant by ‘Western stuff’?”

“Nothing, nothing, nothing.” Tenzou shook his head and changed the subject while acting like he was improving her vocabulary. “Um, to get back on topic... Well, Mitotsudaira-dono was in a difficult position.”

“With the inherited name of Mito Matsudaira?”

“Judge.”

Tenzou checked to make sure there were no guards in the camp. Mary’s spirit spells kept anyone from sensing them from a distance, but they still could not afford to let their guard down. He continued speaking as he moved ahead.

“That was part of it, but being separated from her parents was probably a factor, too. As soon as we began elementary school, she would brag about her mother who could not come to Musashi and about her inherited family name.”

“Given the kind of person she is now, it would be wrong to say that was because she was anxious, wouldn’t it?”

Mary asked another question while arranging another invisibility spirit spell.

“When did that change?”

“I think it was about half a year after we began elementary school. ...That was when she learned the truth. Mito Matsudaira was second in line to the Far East, but...”

He took a breath.

“Horizon-dono was there.”

“I see. Horizon died ten years ago, so she was with you for the first two years of elementary school, wasn’t she?”

Asama nodded and worked through the jamming and noise to see if a new divine mail or chat message had arrived.

“Horizon was...um...Lord Motonobu’s...yes, his official child, but she was a secret. But, well, despite that, pretty much everyone on the Musashi knew about it. So Mito eventually learned about it, but then she said something to Horizon.”

Should I really be saying this? she wondered while feeling pathetic that she had to look over at Kimi for permission.

But all Kimi did was mime shoving a hand between her breasts. Asama concluded nothing good would come of paying any attention to that crazy

person, so she continued the story.

“She said Horizon was an unrecognized child, so she was lower than her in the Far East’s line of succession.”

“———”

Masazumi was clearly dumbfounded and Asama began to panic.

“U-um,” she began. “Th-that was a long time ago! Mito has corrected her personality quite a bit since then, we all understand that, and that was just one especially harsh point from the past. U-um, want to try shoving your hand between my breasts!? Pull out Hanami and you win one free spell contract!”

“No, uh... I was just thinking that kids can be cruel. I used to say some pretty heartless things myself.”

“For example?”

“Well, I once asked my toupee-wearing principal why he always had an air intake on his head.”

Almost Everyone: Deliberating.

“Hey, wait! Why do you only do that when it’s me!?”

“Calm down,” said Asama before sighing.

...Our pasts can be such tricky things.

But that thought led to another one.

...We can tell each other these things because we know each other well enough to know they’ll tell us not to worry about it.

At most, they would laugh and ask why it was even worth saying.

So Asama recalled those days while knowing Horizon would no longer remember them.

“Everyone paled when we heard what Mito said, but Horizon replied with a relieved look on her face.”

She recited the words that still rang in her ears and remained in her memories.

“She said, ‘That means it won’t matter if I disappear, doesn’t it?’ ”

...That's right.

Mitotsudaira thought while fighting her mother. She thought while swinging her hands around, rotating, and sending her body out in small, carving movements.

...There was a princess who was far more worried than me.

How had she felt herself?

She had been avoided for being from a Loup-Garou family and her presence had been treated as a bother, so she had held a childlike pride in making a definite place for herself and keeping anyone else from getting in her way.

But that princess had had difficulty even with her own place.

Mitotsudaira had wondered what she was doing and had not known what to say, so she had run from the classroom.

For a few days afterwards, she had not left her mansion and had feigned illness while curled up in her bed.

She knew she had done something awful.

She had demonstrated a complete lack of understanding to someone feeling even more fear than she had.

But she had soon been able to leave again. The idiot – who at the time she had only thought of as an idiot who hung around the princess a lot – had come by with the princess and the archery girl.

...He said, "Let's go eat yakiniku by the river! My mom's hosting. And if you say you don't want to, Asama says she'll shoot you with the same thing she shot at the opening ceremony."

A knight could not allow herself to be targeted by an evil-destroying arrow, so she had gone to the river.

Everyone had been there and she had sat next to Horizon and the idiot.

...That turned into something pretty awful.

She breathed in a bit, pursued her mother, continued pursuing her, and

thought to herself.

That had likely been her starting point.

“It was pretty lively. And, well, it looked like Mitotsudaira-dono wanted to say something to Horizon-dono.”

Tenzou checked to either side as he spoke and Mary laughed quietly.

However...

“Oh, sorry. But...my sister would often be like that. Yes... There would be no real reason to apologize, but she takes everything so seriously.”

“Judge. Anyway, Toori-dono helped push them along, and...”

He gestured for them to start moving again and mimed an action as he pulled the hand back.

He pretended to grab something with chopsticks and hold it out.

“He rigged a punishment game so Horizon-dono would have to feed Mitotsudaira-dono.”

“Oh, my.”

Mary turned around and saw the idiot following them while shoving his prizes inside a rucksack he had found somewhere or other.

...He sure knows how to live a fulfilling life on the run.

But a lot changed because of him, added Tenzou.

“At the time, Mitotsudaira-dono promised Horizon-dono that she was second in line and a knight, so it was her role to protect Horizon-dono.”

She must have felt a responsibility to wipe clean her guilty conscience, thought Tenzou.

A lot had happened after that and the idiot had eventually read his dream for the future in writing class.

...Was Mitotsudaira-dono able to agree with Toori-dono’s dream?

He could not remember if she had, but that was hardly surprising.

“But after Horizon-dono’s death, Mitotsudaira-dono tried to leave Musashi.”

“Eh?”

Tenzou nodded at Mary’s tone of question.

“Mitotsudaira-dono had been happily looking forward to the festival at which Horizon-dono died. She had heard from Hexagone Française that Lord Motonobu would be announcing that Horizon-dono was his legitimate child, so she was waiting at the ceremony hall. She probably wanted to tell Horizon-dono that she was finally first in line for real.”

But...

“Horizon-dono never made it to the ceremony hall. Neither did Toori-dono.”

When he finished speaking, Mary hung her head a little.

The two Excaliburs must have sensed their master’s will because they lowered down on either side of her. He felt somewhat apologetic, but he continued speaking.

“Mitotsudaira-dono had to have realized she would inherit the Far East if Lord Motonobu passed away without designating a successor. And she must have felt that she had stolen Horizon-dono’s position after promising to protect it.”

“Eh? But that wasn’t her fault...”

“Everyone thinks about things differently.”

“...Judge.”

Mary may have thought of an example of her own because she silently nodded.

Tenzou remembered that time clearly.

...In the end, she must have made up her mind.

Even at that young age, she had tried to take responsibility.

“Mitotsudaira-dono tried to leave Musashi at Bizen IZUMO of southern Hexagone Française. Of course...”

“Of course?”

“Judge. The Reine des Garous was waiting for her there and she did the same thing she did back in IZUMO.”

Even as a child, Tenzou had felt fear as he watched from the deck, but as a result...

“She was ultimately unable to leave.”

...That's right.

A lot had happened in the long time since then.

“For a year or two, she was pretty depressed, but she grew wilder and wilder once we entered middle school.”

Had it been to take back or preserve her pride that her mother had left in tatters? No.

“She wanted to erase her position in the Far East's line of succession. She felt she was unworthy of that position. So she grew violent, her Loup-Garou blood started showing itself more, and she was able to use its power.”

When he thought back on it...

...She may have tried to leave Musashi because she didn't want the rest of us to see her becoming a nonhuman.

“But even as she grew wild, she kept her distance from us and never acted violently to us. She only ever attacked the more oppressive upperclassmen ‘as a knight’.”

“That sounds like a position that would make her popular with the girls.”

“Judge. She still has a lot of fans from that time. But halfway through our first year of middle school, she was called out by those upperclassmen.”

He did not know much about that incident. Asama had still been on speaking terms with Mitotsudaira and she had been worried when she heard about it, so she had gotten Mitotsudaira to tell her where she had been called to.

...But that was a lie.

Everyone had waited *there* equipped for a serious fight, but they had found

nothing there and searched around in confusion.

“Well... I don’t really know what happened, but by the time we found Mitotsudaira-dono behind the school building, we found her looking up into the sky and sobbing with the nudist collapsed in her lap and beaten to a bloody pulp.”

“That sounds like a serious incident.”

He could only agree. But until Asama had prepared her healing spells, Mitotsudaira had refused to leave the nudist’s side and she had returned to her old self afterwards.

The others had not asked for details, but they did know one thing.

“That was when Mitotsudaira-dono became a true knight.”

...That’s right.

Mitotsudaira accelerated and thought about her mother’s assignment.

She was to prove what she had gained.

What was that? What did she have? What had she gained?

She was aware she had acquired quite a bit in the past, but it was all linked together by that incident with the upperclassmen shortly after entering middle school. A certain person had told her the upperclassmen would be waiting for her that evening behind the school building.

She had gone there at the designated time and found a certain person naked, collapsed, and beaten to a bloody pulp. In the distance, the upperclassmen had been leaving in tears yelling, “I-I’ll sue you! You’re the worst! You really are the worst!!” Mitotsudaira had realized what must have happened.

...Honestly, and he had pretty much left me alone up to that point.

But when she had lifted him in her arms while wishing he had minded his own business, he had spoken.

“Sorry.”

For what?

“A while back, I said I’d become a king, but a lot’s happened since then. For one thing, my well-endowed sister once gave me a lecture about looking at reality. And once we got to middle school, everyone started looking a lot more grown up. Their boobs got bigger...well, not you and Adele. Ah, wait. Don’t raise your fist. Calm down. Stay, stay... Not the fiiiiist! Anyway, calm down. Listen. Um, but... But...”

...But?

“I’m going to become a king one day. I’m not going to give up. That’s all I wanted to say.”

What?

“So, um, yeah! ...So I’ll become a king, and, uh... I’ll make a kingdom like the one we could have made with Horizon here, so...”

So?

“I’ll make the kind of kingdom Horizon would have lived in, so you be my kingdom’s knight.”

She had found it ridiculous.

She remembered all too well how she had snapped back at him.

“Are you willing to take on all of the debts in my heart!?”

“Don’t be stupid.” He had smiled. “I can’t do anything, so I don’t care if you leave all your debts with me. So if you have anything like that, just leave it with me. If you’re ever feeling gloomy or down or you’re tormented by memories of the past, then – yeah – just leave it all with me. And you can be my kingdom’s-... Well, for the time being, just be Musashi’s knight. And once I make my kingdom, I’ll call for you.”

She had thought he was an idiot and that there was no way he could do it, but he had smiled up at her with his head resting on her lap.

“And if I make a suitable king, then you become my kingdom’s knight. I think that would make Horizon happy.”

She had thought it was all ridiculous, but then she had found herself crying.

When she had given her dream for the future, she had said she wanted to become a knight and protect people.

Horizon had been her starting line for protecting people. Her young self had decided to start with her, learn about being a knight, and then protect that princess and lots of other people.

But she had lost that starting line.

She had since drifted from that path and she had tried to forget it all because she had felt she had no other choice, but she had been unable to forget anything and that idiot had come to bring her back on track.

“Then...”

It was possible she would walk down a different path in the future, but she decided to hold onto her dream instead of throwing it away.

“Then if you decide to create the kind of kingdom Horizon would have lived in and I can follow you there...”

She had made a promise.

“I will pave the way for you, my king. I will make sure you can continue to hope and never give up despite your loss.”

That was right.

A lot had happened afterwards, she had begun working as one of Musashi's knights, and they had entered high school. He had never said anything more about it, he had become the chancellor and Student Council president, and she had thought nothing would ever come of it, but...

...I'm sorry. That wasn't the case at all.

Her king had not given up on anything.

He had not changed even when he learned Horizon was alive.

He had to be broken, too. He had to have broken when Horizon had died.

He had gained the broken feeling of losing something important to him.

So if Horizon was alive, he would try to fill that brokenness in himself. He would make sure he never lost that important thing again.

That was why he was trying to make the world his own.

“—————”

Mitotsudaira carved the same words into her heart as she had before.

...One day...

I hope one day, my king will be able to actually fill his brokenness instead of taking on the debts of loss the others and I leave with him.

If she was to pave the way...

“I...!”

She moved forward. No matter the hardship, she would move forward so her king need never come to a stop.

“I will not give up!”

Mitotsudaira charged forward.

She ran. She snapped each and every step forward at tremendous speed.

The Reine des Garous also snapped her body to launch attack after attack.

Mitotsudaira fearlessly chose to attack and evade at close range.

The Reine des Garous did the same.

They tore through the wind, smashed the ground, and collided with each other.

The Reine des Garous’s movements were instantaneous and her sharp nails accurately pursued her opponent.

Those were the movements of a wolf.

On the other hand, Mitotsudaira’s movements changed.

She essentially used the same lupine movements as her mother. She raised her initial speed to increase her movement or destructive power. However, those movements began to change and underwent a constant transformation.

“...!”

She was changing from a wolf into something else.

Chapter 80: The One in the Place the Wolf Desires

CHAPTER 80

"The One in the Place the Wolf Desires"



What can you accept
As a human?

Point Allocation (Relief)

What can you accept

As a human?

Point Allocation (Relief)

Mitotsudaira had only one option.

She could only shorten her snapping movements even further.

Instead of snapping her entire arm or leg forward, she would divide it up into parts such as the shoulder to elbow or elbow to shoulder.

She made more precise movements.

She was forced to do this to oppose the Reine des Garous who was larger than her, had a greater reach, and had a higher top speed. If she made the same sort of movements, her mother would catch up and overpower her.

That was why Mitotsudaira made her own movements.

They were rough at first, but she continued to change them each time she repeated them.

“————”

Suddenly, the movements fit into place.

Through repeated trial and error, she found the right answer and learned the trick to it. And...

...I need to make sure I don't forget that trick!

When compared to her mother, she doubted she had enough talent to say she was especially skilled at combat.

She was half Loup-Garou and half human. Her body had the advantages of a beast, but it was still bound by her humanity. She had the initial speed of a wolf, but her human parts were an impediment.

Her movements were neither entirely those of a beast nor entirely those of a human.

Hers was an awkward body.

That was why she added her human side into her bestial movements.

She used her beastly speed to make human movements.

She swung her arms and ran, she bent her elbow and guarded, and she sent out her motionless hand.

Instead of just making quick short jumps with her legs, she ran, performed turns, and stepped forward to attack.

These were not the movements of a beast. She used the combat footwork and martial arts of a knight and a warrior.

It all passed through her body and carved into the battlefield.

She felt like she was carving it into herself.

She carved down her movements, further perfected them the more she made them, and corrected any mistakes she made.

The Reine des Garous' claws, jabs, and kicks grazed her or struck her several times and those claws had just torn into her right upper arm, but...

“ ... ”

She had learned to pull back in the instant of contact to reduce the damage. In her battle with Rudolf II, she had first come to understand these movements of hers through that damage reduction.

And the more she moved, the more the Reine des Garous moved.

She moved like a beast pursuing its prey.

She circled around on a curving path and her claws would rush out if Mitotsudaira showed even the slightest opening.

She even used those attacks as feints and then suddenly attacked from outside Mitotsudaira's field of vision.

...This is insane!

Mitotsudaira felt a cold sweat and evaded on reflex.

The wind whipped up as she moved.

She thought about her next move and sent herself into her opponent's blind

spot.

She changed her movements based on split-second decisions.

This was unlike Futayo's cumulative acceleration or Muneshige's repeated acceleration. She quickly made instantaneous accelerations and stops while changing her fighting style each time she snapped her body around.

She carved out her speed.

With each step, she would launch herself in a different direction. A moment later, she would do something else.

She did not commit herself to anything and would not let her opponent grasp her.

She could not oppose this woman otherwise.

She knew perfectly well that she was inferior.

...So...

She fought back using her full strength and everything else available to her.

"Mitotsudaira-sama is battling her mother?"

On Musashi's bow, Horizon tilted her head as "Musashi" passed on the report that Asama had sent via staticky divine transmission. Next to "Musashi", Sakai looked down on the battlefield from the vertical deck.

"Where are they doing that, I wonder?"

"Sakai-sama... Did you realize Mitotsudaira-sama's mother was the Reine des Garous? Over."

"Now, now. You're sounding a little frightening there, "Musashi"-san. ...Will you be mad if I tell the truth?"

"Based on your answer, I will determine whether you acted inappropriately. Over."

"Ahh." Sakai nodded and placed his kiseru in his mouth. "Then I probably shouldn't say."

“That is a decent compromise, Sakai-sama. Over.”

“Judge, judge.” He nodded again and turned to Horizon. “What do you think, Horizon? Can Nate defeat the Reine des Garous?”

“I cannot say. There are too many uncertainties.”

“Musashi” nodded in agreement and placed a hand on Sakai’s shoulder.

“That is the standard view. Do you understand now, Sakai-sama? You should stop buying black disk sets on the divine network ‘because they look good’ when you have never seen the show and its quality is uncertain. Over.”

“The ‘standard view’ these days has gotten pretty harsh.”

After Sakai’s comment, Horizon continued where she left off.

“But...one thing *is* for certain.”

Asama’s divine mail had mentioned Mitotsudaira’s past.

“It seems Mitotsudaira-sama made a promise to me when I existed before. She promised to protect me. And...”

“And?”

“Her dream was apparently to become a knight and protect people. So what does that mean?”

Horizon expressionlessly looked down on the battlefield.

“I have received that promise once more, so if Mitotsudaira-sama also holds that promise...”

“Then what?”

“Judge. Then she will win. After all...”

After all...

“A knight keeps her promises. Every book I have read says so.”

Mitotsudaira fought her mother.

She slipped through her mother’s attacks, made her own attacks, and then

repeatedly defended or evaded.

She moved.

She gave her speed to every part of her body, carved out each and every movement, and made her attacks at great speed.

She did not use the flowing movement of swordplay and she did not constantly increase of her entire body's speed with acceleration techniques.

She only knew the combat techniques taught in her lessons.

She strengthened those using the speed of a beast.

However, she changed one thing from her lessons.

She kept her hand flat instead of forming a fist.

When a clenched fist hit at high speed, the returning force would destroy her hand. The same would happen if she used the heel of her palm. She wore gloves during training both to reduce the damage to her opponent and to protect her own fist.

Instead, she made straight jabs with her flat hand.

For a human, that would destroy their fingers. If it caught on something, it would rip off the nails.

But things were different for a beast, and...

...I was given a manicure.

The color her king had chosen existed below her white gloves. It was not a product of the workshop she owned, but she wanted to think that was his way of saying it was a present and not something she owned in the first place.

With that blessing on her nails but hidden from the world, Mitotsudaira accelerated her flat hand forward.

She carved down her speed and snapped herself forward as if continuing to carve the movements into herself.

Then, she added on another movement.

To show her mother what she had gained after going to Musashi, she made

several adjustments to her attacks.

“———!!”

She continued forward without ever giving up.

The Reine des Garous saw something nostalgic in her daughter's movements.
She saw human movements.

Hopeful heroes had turned those movements against her countless times in the past. These were the movements of a group who had all become her prey.
These were the movements of those she had eaten.

But, she thought. They must not have been wrong.

After all, someone was opposing her with those movements at their foundation. That someone was a young girl who had a beast's blood and a human body, but who could not defeat a beast with her strength.

Her inability to win made her the same as those hopeful heroes.

...But...

By mixing man and beast, new techniques and power were created.

It almost seemed the Reine des Garous' attacks and martial arts were embracing her and helping her grow.

“———!”

How far would the techniques of the weak take this child?

She did not know.

All she knew was who exactly was pushing this child forward.

The person who had become her husband had saved her when death was her only option and she was prepared to die.

This child's king had saved their princess when death was her only option and she was prepared to die.

This child was that king's knight. She had the same will and the same look in

her eyes.

She takes after her mother in the strangest ways, thought the Reine des Garous.

She was glad she had not gone ahead and killed this child's king.

Eight years ago, this child had been unable to fight back and was left crying and apologizing. She had likely grown twisted afterwards, but that king had kept her from giving up.

He was a good king.

...That was eight years ago, wasn't it?

The Reine des Garous remembered something.

She was certain she had been involved with this child's king when he was worried about becoming a king.

It had happened eight years before.

I was horribly worn down then, thought the Reine des Garous amid the flow of battle.

She had been in a bad mood after returning from beating up her own child at Bizen IZUMO, so she had visited her true home at the candy house. She had wanted to get some rest there.

After a few days, two children had visited at night.

They had apparently gotten lost on their way back from visiting their great-grandmother in IZUMO.

The children were a sister and brother about the same age as her daughter. The sister had been wary of her, but the brother had been extremely excited and she had been forced to tell him all sorts of stories long after the sister had fallen asleep.

He had wanted to hear stories about chivalry. As for why...

"There's something I'm going to do in the future, so I'm gonna become a king."

However, he had also said something else while looking a little more dejected.

“There are some people who look like they might join me, but they all seem to be changing. ...Maybe it won’t work out.”

She had admonished him then.

She felt that had been a mistake. The adult thing to do would have been to tell him that was not the case. However, she had instead told him that everyone gave up on those silly things when they grew up.

She had essentially been “killing” a child’s dream by telling him to look at reality.

The boy had looked like he wanted to say something and she had realized her mistake, but he had spoken before she could say anything else.

“Well, I can do it on my own if I have to.”

To distract him, she had held a late-night candy party with him, keeping it a secret from his sleeping sister.

...But who would have thought?

That boy’s dream wasn’t killed by my admonition. I’m sure plenty of other people tried to “kill” his dream too, but he still became a king.

...I’m glad I noticed it was him.

The night before last, she had noticed from his scent when pressing her cheek against him as he lay in bed. She had thought she was imagining it, but another scent on him was the same as the sister who had visited eight years before.

The children probably did not remember it very well, but it had all led to a single result.

The boy had become a king and her daughter had become a knight.

She understood that her daughter desired a future with this king and the others there, not with her.

So...

“Show it to me.”

She wanted to see proof of the future her daughter had chosen.

“Show me what can stand up to me!”

Mitotsudaira leaped right. She snapped her body to her mother’s left side.

However, her mother was already turning that way.

Her mother’s right hand was flying to stab into the left side of her neck.

She received the attack.

She did not guard or deflect it. Her mother would break through if she guarded with her hand or arm and she would be knocked back herself if she deflected.

She had to use her shoulder.

Her shoulder was a collection of muscles near the center of her body, so a strike from that would match her mother’s jabbing hand.

A beast did not use its shoulder. This was a human defense.

She lifted her left hip forward and used the momentum to send her left shoulder up.

It was a sharp collision. The shoulder of her clothing ripped, sending cloth and chain-supplying parts flying into the air.

“———!?”

She was pushed back. Even her shoulder was knocked back and her mother’s hand twisted back on course to her neck, so...

...The left arm!

The left forearm hanging below her deflected shoulder struck her mother’s right arm from below.

She would lose if she simply tried to deflect it, so...

...I’ll twist it with a wrapping motion!

She had learned this technique in England to deflect Walsingham’s Wars of the Roses. She had been slammed to the tatami mats by Naomasa countless times in training, so the movement had permeated her body.

She twisted her mother's hand outwards to just barely knock it off course.

She felt a cold wind pierce through her hair behind her neck, but she had avoided it.

Then she moved forward. Her target was her mother's left hand. Her mother had just had her right arm deflected outwards, so she was leaning backwards to pull that arm back.

That stance allowed Mitotsudaira to grab her left wrist and perform a twisting backwards throw.

Beasts did not perform throws.

That was why she would do exactly that, slam her mother to the ground, and then attack. Even if she could not throw her, grabbing the wrist allowed her to perform a joint lock or even break the arm.

She had techniques to draw on and she had the strength to pull them off.

She felt no exhaustion. Morning runs across the Musashi with Adele and the others and running after Oriotorai had given her endurance and the ability to focus for longer periods of time.

She could do this.

But her mother's left hand was sent out in a flat-handed uppercut.

It was directed toward the right side of her gut.

That would be a fatal blow, but whether she guarded or deflected it, she would be driven back in front of her mother.

However, Mitotsudaira sought her mother's left hand, so she took action.

"The heel of the palm!"

She stepped forward on her right foot, accelerated by carving down the speed from her toes to her shoulder, and she dropped down the palm of her heel with her fingertips bent. She aimed a bit higher than her mother's flat hand. That meant the wrist.

And to increase the power of the blow, she gave her entire arm a twisting motion.

The attack struck.

She heard the air explode, a ring of wind hit the ground, and her attack counteracted her mother's hand.

Both of their attacks were deflected, but...

"..."

Mitotsudaira corrected her posture by snapping her entire body.

Her returning elbow, her dropping hips, and her rising knee all gained instantaneous speed to cancel the wandering of her body.

As if pursuing her opponent, she moved through the wind to grab her mother's deflected left hand.

But in that instant, she realized all color had vanished from her vision.

"———!?"

Mitotsudaira saw darkness before her.

Everything was dark and the color of her mother's hair, body, and clothing were gone.

All she saw was the night sky visible from the hilltop.

Her mother had vanished.

...Is this...!?

She knew what had happened. After all, this was something she could do.

Instead of a Loup-Garou's acceleration, her mother had used the short-distance acceleration performed over a shorter period of time.

She had carved down her speed as Mitotsudaira had as a combination of wolf and man.

Her mother had pulled it off as a pure wolf.

It can't be, thought Mitotsudaira as she saw fluttering silver hair in the left

corner of her vision.

Her mother was there.

The woman had re accelerated to cancel the wandering of her evading body and then she had circled around to right.

It was the same carved down acceleration as Mitotsudaira used.

“...!!”

That's insane, thought Mitotsudaira in astonishment.

Her mother's build and weight were entirely different from hers.

Mitotsudaira could only carve down her speed like that because of her light, small body. It was obviously a technique made for her, yet her mother had mimicked it with no training or trial and error.

...How skilled is she!?

She was a Loup-Garou.

She was both beast and human. She was closer to the beast side than Mitotsudaira, but she must have powered through the human portions using her beastly strength.

Mitotsudaira was reminded of her opponent's Urban Name: the Reine des Garous.

However, neither of them was in a good position.

She was charging toward her mother's left hand and her mother had done the same.

Their dominant right hands were on the outside.

That meant they first had to twist around and face their opponent.

Deciding to do just that, Mitotsudaira began to move. Her right foot was on the ground, so she poured speed into that ankle.

A moment later, she noticed something was wrong.

Her mother was not turning toward her in the corner of her vision.

She simply saw the color silver spilling down from her mother's hair and the

silver seemed to unfold like origami.

“The silver cross!?”

A three meter silver cross fell from her mother’s hair and supported the woman’s back.

“That’s right.”

Mitotsudaira heard her mother speak.

“The one thing the Loup-Garou race has gained outside of our own existence is the silver armaments. Your silver chains belong to the Loup-Garous, not to you.”

So...

“If you are going to join the humans and show off what you have gained from them, you must use everything you have gained to fight every part of the Loup-Garous.”

She now knew what her mother’s carved down speed had meant.

...Even a Loup-Garou can do that much!

Everything she had gained could be outdone by a beast, so she had to overcome even that.

However, light filled the silver cross as if to criticize her. A panel of bluish-white light in the empty center began to rotate, the cross’s short arms lowered to the end of the long body, and the weapon was cocked.

A moment later, she heard someone look back at her and speak.

“Nate, show me your answer.”

Valkyrie Marteau was fired.

Like a large crossbow, a bolt of light was fired from the cross.

It cut across the empty space with a roar.

The ether blast had been given the power of a physical blow and it struck the empty space itself.

The strike would crush and transform the ground over a diameter of ten meters. The Reine des Garous distinctly saw where it was going to hit.

Her daughter was there.

The light was going to score a direct hit.

...What will you do now?

Do you not have anything else? Can you not fight back against a Loup-Garou?

Your silver chains and this silver cross belong to the Loup-Garous.

Your grandmother, the previous Reine des Garous, obtained these weapons as a memento of a friend she failed to save.

Death was that friend's only option and she was prepared to die.

And she did die.

Your grandmother was unable to save her, so she lived hidden in the forest and I continued that tradition.

But I found someone important to me and he led me into the world of man where I found someone I could call a friend.

...What will you do now?

Yes, thought the Reine des Garous as she asked her question.

Associating with humans had given the Loup-Garou race just one other thing besides those weapons.

“———”

She looked directly at her daughter.

Her two eyes focused on what the Loup-Garou race had gained with a human.

“What will you do now!?”

As soon as she asked that, something fell from the sky, slicing through the explosion of ether.

It was a thick white sword.

The single-edged blade was wrapped in ether and it stabbed straight into the

ground to protect her daughter.

“Ex. Collbrande!?”

The Reine des Garous realized this child had indeed done something she had found to be very difficult.

...*Yes.*

She watched her daughter grab the hilt of the blade that sliced through the ether explosion.

...*Nate.*

She had thought she was an awkward, selfish, and overall lacking child, but...

...*You made some friends, didn't you?*



The explosive pressure was split apart and shattered.

The sword of a king served by knights traveled down the center of it. The knight who had borrowed it raced straight ahead.

The Loup-Garou tried to turn around with all her might, but the knight's speed won out.

When faced with that explosive pressure, the knight had chosen to advance. It might have knocked her to the ground, but she seemed to be saying it was her duty to choose resistance.

She ran forward.

The flying sword proved that the knight had made the correct decision. If she had not chosen to advance, she could not have grabbed its hilt to support it and it would have been blown away by the blast.

That king's sword lent its power to one worthy of being called a knight.

The knight sent that power toward the beast.

"Rrr..."

She howled.

"Ohhhh!!"

The knight that howled like a wolf poured all of her strength into the attack.

She used the speed of a beast to launch the movements of a man.

The cross was deflected into the sky and the beast was knocked away. The knight finished her cry and took a few more steps.

"...!!"

There, she stabbed the sword into the ground and fell to her knees.

Chapter 81: Participant in an Insufficient Place

CHAPTER 81

"Participant in an Insufficient Place"



If you go by land
And-by air
What is left for next time?
Point.Allocation (Repeat Material)

If you go by land

And by air

What is left for next time?

Point Allocation (Repeat Material)

“It sounds like it’s over.”

Mary saw the light coming from Excalibur dim.

They were about to leave the camp, so Tenzou was growing more cautious next to her.

“Was Ex. Collbrande reacting to the Reine des Garous’ silver cross? It flew off so quickly that it’s honestly a miracle M.H.R.R. didn’t see it.”

“Oh, u-um, s-sorry. ...It seems it remembered Lady Mitotsudaira’s presence, so, uh...”

She was unsure if she should say this, but she decided it was okay with Tenzou.

She still felt some hesitation and embarrassment, but she said it regardless.

“I don’t think it could sit idly by when my friend or a knight were in danger.”

Tenzou paused at that and finally nodded.

“That is good to hear.”

“Judge!”

Still, she had caused him some trouble. The two of them decided to leave in a hurry, but then Tenzou moved quickly behind her.

“No! You mustn’t bring that many!”

“What!? Then let’s hide them somewhere and come back to get them next year! Ones like this are sure to be worth a ton! Here, I’ll write ‘Tenzou buried porn games here’ on the pillar!”

“I see you thought this through enough to use someone else’s name to protect yourself! Besides, this is a first-run limited edition with a serial number. It’s probably special-ordered, so they would track it down if you tried to sell it on the

Genova Auction.”

“Ohh, you’re so observant! But your old man was caught with some porn games he swiped while on a covert mission for the Provisional Council, wasn’t he!?”

Mary did not understand what they were talking about, but she was thankful they were accompanying her.

She then ducked down and left the camp with Tenzou.

But after a few steps, he spoke. His portion of Ex. Collbrande had flown away, so he may have been feeling empty-handed. He glanced in the direction the sword had flown.

“That thing is like a dog. Can it detect an individual’s ether reaction?”

“It is the sword that selects the king, after all. But...” Mary thought back to some older history. “Judge. Joan of Arc was captured by England, so the silver cross and other tools used to restrain her were originally made in England. And that means...”

What did it mean?

“The silver chains, the silver cross, and Excalibur might be able to become friends.”

“It would be nice to create a friend park for legendary weapons at home or in the neighborhood, but I also feel like that would bring war to our doorstep.”

“Not to worry. The Reine des Garous’ weapon is also meant to protect.”

After all...

“Joan of Arc was a knight, too.”

The Reine des Garous’ relative had to have been a knight during the Hundred Years’ War. She would have led her comrades as a knight and been friends with many other knights.

...Can we end up like that, too?

Mary could wait for it to happen or actively work to make it happen. She had a number of options, but she decided to leave them all open. She hugged the one

Excalibur while hoping her feelings would reach the wielder of the other one.

“Isn’t that great?”

“Oh, dear. And you call yourself a knight? ...Can you even stand?”

Mitotsudaira did not even feel like nodding as she sat on the ground and listened to her mother.

But she was not sitting because she wanted to. After her attack had hit her mother and knocked the woman away, her strength had quickly left her, she had fallen to her knees, and she had been unable to move.

Her knees were too weak to stand even if she tried, so...

“Fine, then.”

Standing in front of her, her mother placed her arms below Mitotsudaira’s arms and lifted her up. Mitotsudaira blushed from embarrassment and somehow managed to face forward while supporting herself on Excalibur.

“Mother...”

Her mother’s combat dress had a vertical slash down the chest and her mother looked down at it.

“Oh, this?”

Her mother licked a finger and traced it down between her breasts. Mitotsudaira saw the skin below.

“You’re not even hurt?”

“You did hit me. You saw the mark, didn’t you? The silver cross counteracted Excalibur’s ether blade, so it was only a blunt strike. Still...”

Her mother placed her hands on her cheeks, held her breasts between her elbows, and wiggled back and forth.

“The sword must have been slowed down when it passed between my breasts. Having a nice body improves your defenses.”

“And in reverse, my experience proves a flat chest improves your evasion...”

“Now, now.” Her mother pulled the silver cross out from the ground and spun it lightly in her fingers. “I did defend with the silver cross, but you didn’t come at me strong enough. You need to get some extra sword fighting lessons somewhere.”

Mitotsudaira realized something from that.

“Mother, um...”

“That makes two wins and one loss for me.”

That told her the battle was over, but...

“No, this one didn’t count.”

She shook her head and explained why.

“Mother... You didn’t use your Bête de Modulation.”

Her mother still had power left over. That was a fact.

Bête de Modulation.

On nights of the full moon, a Loup-Garou could transform into a beast’s body and gain elements of the beast. However, this was not such a night and the sky was cloudy.

Her mother had often shown her that form when she was a child. She remembered her mother making a mainly humanoid transformation and letting her touch her ears and such. But...

...She stopped doing it once it became clear I couldn’t do it.

“What if you had used that and unleashed your full power as a beast?”

“Then that would not have been a confrontation with your mother.”

“———”

She was at a loss for words and her mother nodded.

“And that form is...yes, it’s only for your father. Now, anyway.”

“...Eh!? Wait...‘now’!? Still!?”

“Oh, c’mon.” Her mother wiggled back and forth. “I can’t believe he actually said, ‘This is what they call “furry”, isn’t it!?’ . And he always loved small animals, so he’s full of hidden qualities. Yes...would you prefer a little brother or a little sister?”

“Wh-what are you talking about!? Where did this come from!?”

“Let me be clear about one thing.”

She could not move, but her mother placed her hands on her shoulders with a serious expression.

“It takes a lot of work to produce a child between different races. Counting back, it wasn’t the work inside the candy house that gave us you; it was the work once we got back to the mansion. Yes, the adult flavor that kept your parents in bed for so long was you, Nate.”

“People keep telling me things I really would rather not know tonight.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

Her mother pulled out some charms and placed them on Mitotsudaira’s back and legs. They were exhaustion-removing charms. They rapidly produced glowing mist and her body began feeling a lot lighter.

Her mother then placed her hands on Mitotsudaira’s shoulders again.

“Listen carefully, Nate.”

“...What is it?”

“I will let you go with your king. You showed me some very interesting things.”

“———”

“But,” her mother continued. “Hurry up and eat him.”

“Eh!?”

Mitotsudaira did not understand what that meant at first, but her mother gave a deep nod and kept talking.

“You see, I quite like that boy, so...yes, I want to make him my child. But all the

legal formalities are such a pain, so you make him your wife.”

“Wh-what are you talking about!? And he wouldn’t be the wife!”

“He’s weak, things are more fun when he’s around, he has authority but not enough, he’s quick to remove his clothes, and he looks good in women’s clothing, so what can you call him but a heroine? Are you okay, Nate?”

“I’m not going to argue over our perceptions of him! Besides, Horizon is already-...”

“The Far East allows concubines, doesn’t it?”

“A knight! I am a knight! I inherited the name of Mito Matsudaira!”

“You can always take a second inherited name. And as a mother, I want to take responsibility for sending my daughter in such a ridiculous direction. Nate, isn’t it a knight’s job to become a bridge between Hexagone Française and the Far East?”

“Kh!”

It was a problem how unyielding and eloquent her mother was.

“But anyway.” Her mother smiled and pushed on her back. “Hurry up and get going. You’re feeling less exhausted now, aren’t you?”

“Well, um...”

Mitotsudaira explained why she could not move. It had nothing to do with exhaustion, injury, or motivation.

“I’m hungry...”

She looked up and saw a surprised look on her mother’s face. And then...

“Pff!”

“D-don’t laugh! I didn’t get anything to eat after the battle with Rudolf II and then I had to deal with this!!”

“Fine, then. Here.”

Her mother held out a wafer. It had come from the candy house’s wall.

“Did the chancellor or someone else remove that?”

“No, I did.”

“I see.”

Mitotsudaira nodded, bit into it, and then realized something.

“M-mother! I thought adults couldn’t remove the candy!”

“Women can become adults or children at their own convenience, you know?”

She just about fell to her knees and then she searched through her skirt’s pocket.

...Here it is.

Margot had probably put it there for her.

She took a breath, pulled it out, and held it out to her mother.

“Nate, is that one of the candy bricks?”

She nodded and her mother tilted her head.

“Did your king get that for you? As emergency food?”

“No, um...”

She was not sure if she should say it, but she doubted her mother would mind.

“I actually tried to remove a piece myself and the entire brick came out.”

After a pause, her mother burst out laughing and Mitotsudaira bared her teeth.

“Y-you did the same thing!”

“C’mon, but I’m so young.”

“Mother? Just to be clear, when a woman your age wears a school uniform with the chest opened like that, it looks like something from a porn video! That’s criminal.”

“Oh, Nate. Are you worried I’ll seduce another man? Don’t worry. I’m devoted to your father.”

Her mother was not listening, so her shoulders drooped and she breathed in once more.

She then used Excalibur to point to the battlefield below.

“I’m going, okay!? I’ll eat on the way!”

The battle was in full swing below the hill, so she rested Excalibur on her shoulder and started down.

“Let’s go, mother. The others are waiting!”

The battle outside Magdeburg was mostly contained to the wide wasteland at the bottom of the western hill.

To keep the Hexagone Française warriors from Magdeburg, ten thousand of the siege troops had formed a wall and were hoping for a clash.

The first from Hexagone Française to respond was the God of War unit at the front.

Eight lightly-equipped white Gods of War used the momentum of descending the hill to charge into the rear guard formed from M.H.R.R. Catholics and P.A. Oda.

The M.H.R.R. Catholics had prepared their lightly-equipped mobile shell unit on the front line.

They were all equipped with long spears or large shields that attached to the hard points on the shoulder armor, but the equipment was all designed to defend against Gods of War. The shields and spears were designed to stop an attack instead of making one, so they were installed with shock absorbers and spell charms.

Also...

“Shajaaaa!”

P.A. Oda boys and girls stepped forward with spell cloths wrapped around their arms and legs.

As they waited for the Gods of War to get close, they crouched down.

“Okay!”

Then they activated the protective spell cloths.

Light wrapped around the cloths. Three-dimensional sash-shaped emblems made to look like arms appeared on the cloths covering the back of their hands.

The light was projected outwards and gained physical form.

This created giant arms made of light.

Both arms were approximately four meters long. The M.H.R.R. Catholic students spoke amongst themselves while glancing over at those objects of light.

“The unique spell of a unique religion. It’s created by combining the holy spells with native Middle-Eastern spells, but it might as well be a pagan spell.”

“Was it called Malaika? They were told a wind spirit arm would be completely pagan, so I hear they made this angel version for while they’re with us.”

“Then again, to us Catholics, summoning an angel should really be done with more reverence. ...From what I can see, I think it’s what we would call an arm manifestation of the Virtues. If this loses to some Gods of War, we aren’t going to hear the end of it from... No, K.P.A. Italia was crushed, so I guess they can’t complain.”

“I see,” said someone while turning to look at the P.A. Oda students. “Then hesitating here would be pointless. ...We’re relying on you.”

The P.A. Oda students nodded back.

“Being in a position of trust sure can be a pain.”

“Yeah,” someone replied. “But war isn’t that bad. We’ve got an enemy, we’ve got a strategy, we’ve got a mission, and we’ll lose something if we don’t win.”

“Yeah,” said someone else. “We can defend each other’s methods and work together without worrying about what we’re allowed to do or not. ...We could never do this in peacetime.”

They all laughed.

But the white Gods of War were approaching up ahead. The machines were getting close, so the clash would arrive soon.

They all prepared to defend.

M.H.R.R.’s mobile shell unit activated their equipment and spells.

“P.A. Oda, we’ll do what you can’t.”

The P.A. Oda students responded by raising the their giant armored arms.

“Then M.H.R.R., we’ll do the same for what you can’t do.”

“That’s right,” said someone with a laugh. “But don’t do what I *can* do, okay? I can’t do anything else.”

They all laughed.

“Now then,” they said while lifting their hips in a defensive posture.

The eight Gods of War charged in.

The sounds of clashing metal and shouting sounded out.

“ ... ”

On Musashino’s bridge, Suzu placed her hands over her ears and Noise Neighbor Mk. 2.

She did not like the clashing sounds on the battlefield, especially of the initial collision, because they contained a lot of painful noise. So...

“Suzu-sama, I will equalize the noise extracted from around the battlefield. Over.”

“Right. Judge.”

Suzu nodded and the sounds from the battlefield grew a little smaller as they were equalized.

It had apparently originally been a prayer control spell, but...

...It makes it all sound crowded.

She wondered if it was inappropriate to liken it to the streets during a festival. Also...

“Suzu-sama, many of the battlefield conversations require ethical restrictions, so I will place an experimental information processing spell to apply those restrictions and to place a softening opener to the battlefield conversations.

Over.”

After she nodded again, the voices from the battlefield were lowered to a carefree volume and had a softening opening phrase added in.

“I’m feelin’ like more! I’m feelin’ like you need to send in more reinforcements!”

“Kwah!! D-dammit! I’m feelin’ like you took the best part from me!”

“Platoon 7! I’m feelin’ like you need to fix your chain of command!”

There was no change to what they were actually saying, but it did make it much nicer to listen to.

She could face it now.

She nodded, moved her hands, and created a layout of the people on the battlefield.

They were mostly packed in close together, moving quickly, and swinging around large arms.

They were being opposed by large...people?

...These people are a lot like “Musashino”-san...and the others?

Are they...automatons? Oh, these are...Gods of War.

Regardless, there were a lot of people there.

She placed her hands in the air with light tapping and stretching movements to create models of them all. With so many people, it took time to shape them all, but that could not be avoided.

“Musashino” must have understood because she spoke up while standing next to Suzu.

“Representing units seems difficult. I think we should search for a better representative shape for your purposes. If you have an idea, please let me know. Over.”

“Right. Thank you...”

Something bothered Suzu, so she asked about it.

“...Is this too much trouble?”

“O-of course not! Automatons can’t express things in general terms, so if I called this trouble, I would be completely rejecting my own existence! Over.”

That had apparently been the wrong thing to say. A few of the automatons hung their heads and patted each other’s shoulders.

“Suzu-sama, we have determined humans are nonstandard beings when compared to standardized individuals like us,” said “Musashino” with a nod. “But nonstandard only means everything is not entirely standardized, so it is not a negative. I have determined that nonstandard aspect can be a positive in some situations.”

She touched the battlefield model with a hand.

“I have determined that humans conveniently downplay their negative aspects in ‘general terms’ and that you conveniently expand on your positive aspects in ‘general terms’. This makes things easier for you and lets you focus in on your positive aspects to make them your weapon.”

Yes.

“It is because you are nonstandard that no human fits an entirely standard mold. Suzu-sama, if you assist us with your nonstandard side, I have determined the quality of Musashi’s flight will improve. Over.”

“...Right.”

Suzu nodded.

“I’ll...do my best.”

“Judge.”

Hearing that word, Suzu decided she would work hard while focusing only on what she did best. At the very least, that was the best plan for when she was here with everyone else.

...That way Horizon can get everything back.

“Right.”

She expanded her scope.

The battlefield she created included the transport ship the others were on, the river, the city, the hills, the forest, and the Hexagone Française ships.

“...?”

What is this? she wondered.

Something caught her attention below the motion on the battlefield.

“...The south?”

It was uncertain, but she could sense something there in “general terms”.

Then the battlefield filled with voices as if to drag her attention away. They came from the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda formation after being hit by the God of War charge, but they were not screaming.

“I’m feelin’ like it’s time to counterattack!”

The collision looked a lot like eight blades plunging into a thick gathering.

Initially, the eight Hexagone Française Gods of War used their momentum to break halfway through the enemy group, but the commander God of War sent out a divine transmission as they did so.

“Return to your positions!”

The commander, the second-in-command, and four others understood the command and made it in time. They stood up with a quick back step and pulled free of the split in the group.

They abandoned their long spears by letting them separate from their shoulder hard points. After all...

“They’re trying to pull us in!”

The enemy had not been knocked backwards. They all pressed their shields and spears in and held their ground with their giant arms, but...

“They rose up and moved back as far as we pushed in! This isn’t a normal defensive formation! They’re trying to deflect our attacks and surround us!”

It happened as soon as the Gods of War switched from an offensive to

defensive stance.

“Shaja!”

Several dozen P.A. Oda students stepped up on their fellow students’ angel arms and jumped into the air. Wind movement spells enveloped their legs and Garudas scattered from them.

“...!”

The Gods of War were unable to move as the angel arms repeatedly struck their legs, torsos, and faces. The arms of light shattered and the cloth scattered, but...

“Don’t worry about it! Drive them back!”

The God of War unit began calmly wearing down the enemy formation. They swung their two swords from below, deflected and split the approaching enemy’s spears, tore into their shields, and drove back the flying ones with the wall of swords.

The charge was making progress, so the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda students responded. The Gods of War used strength, so the people used numbers. That resistance made their overall strength appear equal, but...

“So they’re here!”

Some more figures caught up from behind the God of War unit.

After running down the hill, the Three Musketeers unit created square formations using hundreds of automatons.

Hexagone Française’s musketeer unit charged in a straight line. They were packed in tight, but their feet moved in perfect unison.

“Show them the speed born of *Belle de Marionnette* control!”

Henri, the feminine member of the leading Three Musketeers, gave her order and the three square formations nodded in unison.

“Testament!”

With that word, the combat-equipped maid automatons began running with

perfectly matched paces.

Their target was the enemy formation. The Gods of War had been packed in close enough that the outer edges of that formation were showing their backs.

The western edge of the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda formation quickly turned around, but not soon enough.

Their dense circle around the Gods of War meant they were separated from their neighbors when they turned toward an enemy coming from a single direction, and that confused them.

That was when the musketeer unit rushed in.

But just as the musketeer unit arrived within one hundred meters of them, another formation suddenly appeared.

“Below!”

In the southern sky, Suzu tilted her head and created something like a cloud before jogging back to the battlefield.

It was below. Another formation was coming from below the battlefield.

...I know this!

She had experienced it once before in England. The muffled sensation had been different with a different sort of ground, so it had not occurred to her sooner. Still, she recognized it once it began to move and entered the air.

“It’s the...same! That Kaga...person’s...!”

The enemy came from below.

They came from the depths of the earth. The Millionen Geist crawled out from the dirt.

They did not come from the north, the south, the west, or the east. Nor did they fall from the sky.

“I’m glad I made it in time. I don’t have much of a budget, but let’s make this

quick.”

That voice was followed by the appearance of the warriors. They came from the ground directly below.

“...!?”

The automatons quickly braked as white hands crawled out at their feet and in front of them.

These were arms of bone.

Pulled up along with the arms, bony heads appeared with four coins embedded in the forehead. Then came the body, the lifted knees and waist, and finally the legs. In the end, there was an army of Living Bone warriors.

“Kaga Millionen Geist, we’ll start with ten thousand. ...How about we get going?”

That voice came from the southern sky. A fleet appeared there, starting with the bows.

They were all aerial warships with the emblems of M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda. A few still bore the scars of battle, but they all made their way straight forward and descended.

Someone in a red uniform stood on the lead ship’s boxy bow with golden coins in his hand and his small wife on his shoulder.

“Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks 4-2, Maeda Toshiie. I’ll be joining this battle.”

Chapter 82: Messengers in a Crumbling Place

CHAPTER 82

"Messengers in a Crumbling Place"



What is accumulated?
The dead or the living?
Point Allocation (Progress)

What is accumulated?

The dead or the living?

Point Allocation (Progress)

An army joined the battle from underground.

As the Three Musketeers' royal guard unit attempted to attack the siege troops, the skeleton army appeared between the two forces.

The enemy rising from the earth took the form of bones, but they were actually a product of ether containing a dead soul. But due to their bony form, the musket-wielding *Belle de Marionnettes* on the outer edge of the formation reached a certain conclusion.

"I have determined firing on them will have little effect!"

"Then bring out the core unit's spear formation!"

The musket-wielding outer edge unit all turned around and a spear-wielding formation rushed forward from behind them. They wore combat maid uniforms and raced forward with their hips lowered for stability. Their spears were fixed in place to strike the bones.

The bones broke and the *Belle de Marionnettes* realized something.

"I have determined the bones have poor movement! They are slow!"

Which meant...

"I have determined they are using their numbers to form a barrier!"

The ten thousand dead were meant to slow them down.

The maids fell back for the moment. It was a regulated movement and they moved back about a dozen meters in complete unison.

"Again!"

When the leading row hit, the tips of their spears would shatter the ether skeletons.

White fragments scattered through the night and their spears moved in arcs to

stand vertically. Also...

“Front row, fall back!”

Finished attacking, the row of raised spears took a single step to the right and back stepped away. To their left, the next row rushed in with their spears at the ready.

They set up a rotation for a continuous charge.

They would not stop.

There were approximately six hundred maids against the ten thousand skeletons. The rows were one hundred across, so excluding the musket unit, there were four rows' worth. But with each attack, they provided a loss of nearly one hundred to the enemy and continued breaking them. And...

“Go!”

The Three Musketeers took care of the remaining flanks of the skeleton unit. Henri summoned four giant blades on the right, Armand lifted the ground on the left to close it on the skeletons like a book, and Isaac, the *Lourd de Marionnette* style of automaton, spread his cannon arms on either side to fire on both flanks.

With their support, the charging unit only had to rush straight in with their spears, and eventually...

“I can see them!”

They could indeed see the *Lourd de Marionnettes* that were sweeping away the enemy.

So the maids prepared their spears and performed one final charge.

They moved onward. They raced forward. They knew the front row would breach the enemy, so they pushed through as a single whole.

“Full speed ahead!!”

They ran and tore through the enemy

But a sudden movement reached them.

It came from behind them. An unexpected strike hit them from directly behind.

Henri, the feminine member of the Three Musketeers, learned of her fellow *Belle de Marionnettes'* confusion through their shared memory. There were countless messages there, but they were mostly questions of "What!?" toward an unknown entity. Also...

...From behind!?

Henri turned around and saw it.

The enemy was there. They were made of bones, but they looked different. These were not the weak bones shaped like a human skeleton that had been smashed before.

These humanoid forms were made from a collection of bones. They were over three meters tall and resembled large apes.

Ether bones had been drawn in and bent to form not just a skeleton but an entire beast including muscles.

"What is this?"

She found the answer at the bottom of her vision.

There were of course bones there.

The smashed and scattered bones seemed to be slowly melting and gathering together.

They joined together, some to become bundles of arm muscles and some to become part of a breastbone.

Once they were finished binding together, they formed arms and legs, but they were still clearly made from a collection of bones of uneven length. Even in their completed form, the scars from fractures or the ends of the bones were apparent and the right and left limbs were sometimes different lengths. The gulden coins embedded in their foreheads were made with a hole and a narrow red light extended from that hole in search of prey.

Their creation took only a few seconds and Henri estimated the total number used to make one.

“Approximately...one hundred!?”

The beasts made from one hundred skeletons were about three meters tall. They looked somewhat like large apes, but they ran on two legs and suddenly swung up their arms.

“...!”

Their rapid tackle blew away the *Belle de Marionnettes* from behind.

The maids were slow to react because they did not understand what was happening. The large apes made from white bones did not hold back. They rushed in with bestial movements.

“———!!”

They roared and attacked the maids.

The maids flew through the air with a sound of destruction. They prepared their spears and thrust at this new enemy, but...

“We can’t get through!?”

These humanoid forms had the density of one hundred skeletons. Even the spears could not break through, so more and more of them broke.

However, others stepped forward in place of the spear unit.

It was the musket unit that had created the outer edge of the initial formation. They kept low, rushed between the spear unit and the enemy, and got down on one knee. They prepared their weapons and used a simplified smart system to target the humanoid bones by synchronizing the movements of their eyes with their arms.

They wanted to break the joints and seams, so they fired anti-mobile shell bullets into those spots.

The white broke, the distance between them shortened, the bones burst, and a few of them arrived close enough to smash the maids into the ground. However, the *Belle de Marionnettes* completed their attack unfazed.

They broke the enemy.

At the very least, they broke the enemy's front line and created an opening. The spear unit used that opening to regroup and face the rest of the enemy.

"Spear unit, charge!"

They picked up as much as speed as the enemy had, used gravitational control to prevent the spears from shaking, and attached the spears to the hard points on their sides. They intended to pierce straight through the enemy by keeping themselves from wavering in the slightest.

As the spear unit charged in, a sudden strike from below knocked them into the air.

"...!?"

An intense sound rang out as the dolls were destroyed. After they were thrown into the air, the running apes had knocked them back down or tackled them to destroy them even more.

The sounds of breaking porcelain and snapping threads continued for a while.

Then everyone saw something beyond the large apes that were coming their way after destroying the charging spear unit. This was what had knocked the spear unit into the air from below.

"Lourd de Marionnettes!?"

"No," someone shouted over their shared memory. "Those aren't *Lourd de Marionnettes!*"

After all...

"They're made of bone!"

These giant dolls were made from molded ether bone. There were three of them, they were over ten meters tall, they had twisted asymmetric shapes, yet they had likely been humanoid to begin with.

"They're giant skeleton dolls!"

"Exactly. This would normally be the end of it, though."

Someone in a red uniform looked down from the bow of a warship floating in the sky. He wore an M.H.R.R. boy's uniform with the numeral "4" sewn in white.

"Maeda, are those your mercenaries?"

"Testament, Matthias. That is the true form of my Kaga Millionen Geist."

Matsu sat on Toshiie's shoulder and she had white ether wings on her back. She narrowed her eyes when he stroked her wings and he turned his head to the side.

Matthias leaned on the deck's railing there, looking down at the battlefield.

Toshiie shrugged and explained his "men" fighting below.

"First, ten thousand mercenaries are smashed so they can gather together into one hundred elites."

And...

"Those one hundred elites become ten large dolls."

"So they grow stronger the more you break them down? How very human."

"Testament. Automatons are different because it's all over once they break. But spirits of the dead are still human. Of course, that begs the question of what I am if I control them."

Toshiie brought a hand to his waist where he had a sword made from a roll of coins.

When he flicked the pommel of the coin roll sword, the hilt's wrapping peeled back to reveal silver coins with holes in the center. The coin stocker being used as a sword guard accurately dropped four coins to the floor.

"The Landsknechte are hired for four gulden and swear to fight in the name of their holy land and their god."

The fallen coins were gathered by an arm of bone that suddenly grew from the floor. With a snapping motion, the coins vanished into the palm. After confirming the sight, Toshiie spoke to the battlefield below.

"Now, you can enjoy life for the first time in a long while. Let's start with three and stick together. Make sure to work yourself to the bone as you fight."

Henri moved out front.

“Armand! Create a barrier wall with the ground! Musketeer unit, you focus on defense without destroying the bone apes!!”

After giving her orders, she ejected two additional swords into the air. She already had four, so that was six in all.

Of those, she set three to be controlled by fingers of her right hand and the other three to be controlled by fingers of her left hand. And...

“Fall back!”

The maids tried to retreat, but the walking large skeletons kicked them and crushed them underfoot. Henri clicked her tongue, moved forward, and ran toward the large skeleton in the center.

She swung the left three blades horizontally like swinging a knife with a reversed grip.

A sound of breaking filled the air.

Light scattered and the large skeleton’s chest split apart. The inside was not hollow; it contained a dense collection of bone. But the bundles of bone moved like organs or flesh and the rest of the body swung an arm toward Henri even with its chest smashed.

Henri thrust her right three blades straight forward. She drove them deep inside the chest and the blade controlled by her middle finger broke out the back.

“Tear apart, you lowly servant.”

The blades controlled by her index finger and ring finger tore out through either side of the chest.

She had completed her attack.

With repeated sounds of breaking, the large skeleton’s torso shriveled downward. But the unharmed stomach and below were carried forward by the legs. The shoulders were only attached by the back and it dangled upside down

behind the rest.

Pulled by the dangling shoulders, the entire body fell backwards. The legs seemed to fall into a sitting position and kicked around for a bit, but they finally came to a stop. And...

...It's vanishing?

That was exactly what happened.

The large skeleton sank into the ground and vanished as if it were crumbling and melting.

Henri did not have time to think "one down". She had to destroy the other two, so she immediately turned to the left and gave instructions to her retreating comrades.

"Hurry to the *Lourd de Marionnette* unit on the other side!"

But there was no response. Wondering why, she looked over and found the maids staring wide-eyed behind her.

...?

Henri looked back as she ran to the left.

A fourth and fifth large skeleton were standing up.

...Why!?

The musketeer unit had stopped destroying the bone apes, so why were more large skeletons rising?

"Did they...?"

She immediately found the answer. The large bone apes had begun cannibalizing each other.

They were killing each other to make themselves into large skeletons. Armand described the sight over their shared memory.

"Simply put, this is hell."

As if to confirm that, more and more sounds of destruction rose into the sky.

They would punch each other, pierce each other, and bite each other. Then

several of them would intertwine.

“———!!”

Six of them stood and gave scream-like roars.

They then helped the large apes that had begun killing each other.

They crushed them.

This created a total of eight large skeletons. The ones that had been created earlier began to move and Armand spoke when he saw them.

“Hey, Henri, it looks like they’re fans of yours, so you deal with them.”

“Based on the feedback, it looks more like they’re your fans, so you deal with them.”

“Request interception.”

Hearing Isaac’s comment, Henri prepared her blades with a smile and Armand swung up the earth’s crust with his teeth showing. Isaac let the maids climb on top of him before moving away to defend the main formation on the hill.

Henri understood she could defeat these large skeletons, but there were too few of her. That left only one method.

...The princess’s ship needs to fire down on the enemy even if it means catching us in the blast.

Just as she settled on that plan of action, two of the approaching large skeletons were suddenly sliced in two. They were both cut through the torso and at the exact same time.

“...!?”

What was that? she wondered while forgetting to even defend herself. First, wind blew in and the bones blew about as a blizzard of dust. The large skeletons were worn away by the great wind and two *Lourd de Marionnettes* were visible beyond those bisected forms.

They both had canine head armor, the larger of the two was white, and the other was blue.

“Satomi’s Yatsufusa and Righteousness!?”

Yoshiyasu held her sword lowered on the left while she checked on her surroundings.

...There are four battlefields.

The first was within Magdeburg.

The second was the close-in battle between the Hexagone Française gods of war and the joint M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda unit being held near the outer wall.

The third was right here where they were. And the last was...

“In the sky.”

She could hear cannon fire from the side. Below the clouds, the M.H.R.R. fleet recently arrived from K.P.A. Italia had begun exchanging cannon blasts with the Hexagone Française fleet.

As far as she could tell, the M.H.R.R. fleet was damaged and worn down.

But they had the upper hand in morale. They had arrived intending to fight a naval battle while Hexagone Française had expected the fight to primarily occur on land, so their battle preparations and spirit were completely different.

The M.H.R.R. ships were creating a low-altitude formation beyond Magdeburg on the opposite eastern bank of the Elbe. Their bows were pointed toward the Hexagone Française fleet to expose a smaller surface area to enemy fire. Also...

...By using Magdeburg as a shield, Hexagone Française can't fire directly on them.

The Hexagone Française fleet was positioned at the top of the hill and they could not ignore the ground units or Magdeburg down below. They could only fire in parabolic arcs that were guaranteed to clear Magdeburg.

But M.H.R.R. was positioned lower, so they had a straight shot at the Hexagone Française fleet's belly.

Yoshiyori understood that too and he spoke up while keeping Yatsufusa low.

“Yoshiyasu, prepare to fly to Magdeburg.”

“Are we giving up on this area?”

“No. You need to save the Musashi students. Your job is to pick up the ones fighting within Magdeburg and deliver them to the transport ship. After all, the Hexagone Française fleet may have drawn the M.H.R.R. fleet’s attention, but Musashi is using that opening to send two diplomatic ships down behind the cathedral to protect the transport ship when it ascends. Once the diplomatic ships arrive, the transport ship will begin for the Musashi, but...”

“I need to pick up those remaining in Magdeburg when that happens?”

“Yes,” said Yoshiyori. “Their opponents in the city are Shibata and Sassa and they are both powerful enough to destroy a transport ship. Musashi’s vice chancellor and special duty officers are fighting to keep them away from the transport ships. ...Your duty is to rescue them.”

He did not ask if she knew what to do afterwards, but did that mean he trusted her understanding?

A sign frame appeared next to her sight devices containing the predicted position of the M.H.R.R. fleet’s formation and their predicted line of fire that Yatsufusa had calculated. She took the sign frame, but Yoshiyori was not done speaking.

“Don’t go right away.”

The bones still remained and there were more than just the seven large skeletons surrounding them.

“Were more of the original bone soldiers added!?”

There were probably ten thousand of them. As they rose from the ground, they devoured each other and grew.

The enemy was attacking with pure numbers, but...

“You have our thanks!”

A commander of the Three Musketeers rushed in outside of their attack range. She swung up her six giant blades and repeatedly hunted down the midsized enemies.

“Testament!”

The automaton spear and musket units ran alongside her making their own

attacks.

“Testament,” said Yoshiyasu. “Resuming attack.”

As the roar of cannon fire grew thicker overhead, she swung her blade.

The attack on and defense of Magdeburg was split between two locations.

The first was by the Elbe River where Futayo fought Katsuie on the rooftops of the buildings flooded up to the second floor.

The other was to the west, near the city entrance from the plantation, where Narimasa fought the two Technohexen in the complex arrangement of back alleys.

One of the Technohexen, Naruze, flapped her wings within the city to fly as quickly as she could.

...The water has come in quite a bit.

Even on the west side of the city, the water was filling the streets and submerging everything.

That was why Narimasa did not use the ground up ahead. He kicked off the edges of walls in narrow gaps between buildings to fly through the air like a ricocheting bullet. The two Technohexen were pursuing him and attacking.

Narimasa’s movements were quick and sharp. He kicked off one wall and it looked like he was going to land on the second story wall of the opposite building, but he immediately ran a few steps along that wall and jumped onto the roof of a building on the initial side.

Naruze accelerated her wings in pursuit and Margot did the same next to her.

“Ga-chan, it’s starting to feel like everyone can run along walls these days. But that can’t be true, can it?”

“If you only look at the weirdos, you’ll end up with screwed-up standards.”

“I don’t want to hear that from people who are flying!”

Naruze tilted her head at Narimasa’s protest.

“But this is a normal part of our race.”

Oh, that means I’m normal, realized Naruze. *Yeah, it’s everyone else who’s weird.*

Narimasa fell silent, so they followed him and attacked.

Naruze primarily used her homing bullets.

When she fired the bullets of light across the street, Narimasa quickly kicked off the wall to both evade and move further ahead.

But that was when someone else attacked.

“He sure is fast!”

That person was Margot. She fired straight line bullets that pierced far down the street to hold Narimasa in check as he jumped between buildings.

But Narimasa did more than run away. He smashed the building walls with his heel when he jumped or tore signs or stones from the wall to throw them. Those held the Technohexen in check and deflected the bullets, but he also used his own movements without relying on those objects.

“...!”

He dodged the bullets.

The narrow street was difficult for the Technohexen to navigate. With water filling the bottom of the streets, Naruze had assumed the battlefield would shift to the rooftops, but the enemy had chosen to travel below the roofs.

Reality can be so cruel, she thought. *Doujinshi are much more honest.*

But for Narimasa, the narrow roads allowed him to keep his jumps short and quick.

...That’s why this idiot wanted to travel down the city’s slope.

When kicking off the walls, he could move faster on a downward slope.

Sure enough, Narimasa’s speed was picking up.

“Ga-chan, where does this lead!?”

“Magdeburg’s Maurice Cathedral. Everyone’s waiting for the nudist in the

transport ship behind it, but it seemed like a good spot for a date. It didn't look like people go there often. ...Sounds nice, doesn't it!?"

"I hope the place is reconstructed by the time we stop here next year."

...That was an implied yes! Herrlich!

Her spell exploded. She had clearly not intended to hit, but that was exactly why Narimasa looked back.

"W-watch out, you idiot! You're serious about this, aren't you!?"

"What? Don't assume you know what you're talking about. Are you stupid? All I have to do is hit you."

"Th-this girl!"

"Shut up or I'll put you in a doujinshi!"

Naruze opened a Magie Figur and sent a few diagrams and some text to the transport ship.

Mal-Ga: "Asama, this can reach you from here, right? Can you pass this on!?"

She did not check for a response after sending it and she pulled on Naito's hand in midair.

"Let's go win this!"

"Have you given up on victory, daughter of Tadakatsu!?"

In the submerged city, the battlefield had moved to the rooftops surrounded by dark flowing water and Futayo let Katsuie's words wash over her.

He was saying she did not intend to win and she understood that.

He said so because she was focused on defense.

Currently, Futayo had her back to the cathedral in the north and Katsuie was to the south. She was keeping him from reaching the transport ships behind the cathedral and her duty was to hold him here until the entire battle was won.

Her method was simple.

She would crush his attacks as soon as he made them.

Kamewari was a divine weapon that needed to charge up and it smashed anything reflected in its blade, so when he swung it, she would take action before it could turn towards her.

...The key is to counterattack and keep him from completing his swing!

She used the tip of Tonbokiri. She simply watched Kamewari's movement and thrust Tonbokiri into the base of the blade when he started to swing it. When she did, Katsuie roared back at her.

"Damn you!"

"Damn you," replied Tonbokiri.

A metallic sound rang out, she felt an impact through her weapon, and Katsuie pulled his weapon back.

That was all it was. Of course, this method meant she could not attack, but...

"Have you given up on victory!?"

She had not. She simply defined victory differently here.

...After all, the glasses boy and Masazumi said a lot about some kind of strategy.

She had not understood much of it, but it had probably been important since the glasses boy was a nerd and Masazumi had said some confusing things. It was important to be understanding of such things.

So she stuck to this. Whenever Katsuie tried to swing Kamewari, she would attack and stop it.

"Damn you!!"

"Damn you."

He moved again and she stopped him again.

"Damn you!!!"

"Damn you."

She continued stopping him.

Instead of an intense clash, it was a smaller strike that stopped just his initial

movement.

Her challenging spear tip would deflect the initial swing of his blade and the sparks illuminated the night and the water below the roofs.

It grew into a continuous barrage.

The amount of metallic sparks grew the more they moved. She also knocked his blade back with greater frequency.

...This is quite an intense exchange!!

Each movement of her spear was flowing into the next and she started also using the bottom end to knock his blade away. The straight line of the spear made it faster and holding it in both hands increased its strength, but she could not hope to match Katsuie's strength as a demonic long lived. Every few attacks she received pushed her back half a step.

Futayo sensed danger in that backwards movement.

After all, they were fighting atop a straw-thatched roof sticking above the water.

It was not the best footing.

During her training, she had been taught that tile roofs were rare in Europe during this time period, even on royal palaces.

The Musashi had adopted a portion of the Far East's tile roof culture, so they were common especially on the diplomatic second ships. However, Magdeburg's focus on the history recreation meant almost all of the roofs were made of straw.

The gabled straw-thatched roofs had their straw swept away by the rising water. It sometimes floated up from the edge like a blanket and it sometimes came off as soon as the water touched it.

That was why they fought in the center of the roof. The roof's ridge was their only footing.

...So I can't use my usual footwork.

Not only could she not run and jump around, but even swinging her body to

either side proved difficult. She could only move forward and back or a step or two to either side.

And when the roof was swept away, she was forced to move to the next one.

But the same applied to her enemy. Katsuie could only move forward and he could only do that by removing her from his path.

That was why she focused on knocking back his attacks.

Katsuie then gave a shout.

“Damn you! And you call yourself Musashi’s vice chancellor!?”

He is trying to provoke me, concluded Futayo.

He was asking how she could be a vice chancellor without fighting.

But she did not need to respond. She knew this was enough for a vice chancellor. After all, she had seen this before.

...I am using the bunting technique of Tres España Vice Chancellor Hironaka Takakane-dono!

Takakane would knock down his opponent’s attacks to throw off their balance.

Futayo had been on the receiving end more than enough during the attack as they approached England.

She had never been able to break through this technique.

But even after so much experience on the receiving end, she was having trouble using it herself. She could only deflect her enemy’s attack one out of every third time and she was allowing him to advance.

She became even more painfully aware of how high level of a technique it was.

He had pulled it off against countless opponents at the same time and all from different directions.

She was inexperienced and the world was a large place. That was what this meant. But she did her best to fight and move even a little bit closer to his level.

Katsuie responded by raising his speed.

He began his attacks again and again from many different angles and Futayo stopped them with a high-speed barrage.

“————”

Their exchange accelerated.

Fifteen minutes after the Sack of Magdeburg began, individual battles had settled into place across the region as everyone worked to fulfill their respective roles.

The history recreation of the Sack of Magdeburg was approaching its climax.


Meanwhile, Toori's group slipped from the M.H.R.R rear guard which was responding to Hexagone Française's charge. The side effects of Toshiie's bone army had slowed them down, but they could already see Magdeburg and the Musashi.

They had experienced many twists and turns along the way, but they were only a step away from arriving.

Chapter 83: Everyone in a Place of Reunion

CHAPTER 83

"Everyone in a Place of Reunion"



The more you hurry
The less you seem to reach it
But the next thing you know
It is right in front of you
Point Allocation (Desperation)

The more you hurry

The less you seem to reach it

But the next thing you know

It is right in front of you

Point Allocation (Desperation)

The appearance of the bone mercenaries also affected some people not on the battlefield.

Those people were Tenzou's group moving toward Magdeburg in the M.H.R.R. siege troops' abandoned camp.

They could already see the mostly broken western wall of the city, but...

"A-a lot of bone soldiers are coming up behind us!"

The bones were already in pursuit, so there was no point in hiding. And there was something else Tenzou noticed.

...Is there no one in the vicinity of the camp?

Ever since the bone mercenaries had risen from the ground, he could see no sign of anyone else this close in to Magdeburg.

...Is that to make sure they aren't caught in the middle of the bone mercenaries?

Mary ran to his left and she used Ex. Collbrande to attack the bones approaching from that side.

"Ey!"

It was a solid blow. *Truly a diligent sword*, thought Tenzou as the bones were broken and they rushed toward the city.

Their direction of travel meant the bones were all coming to Mary's side.

"If you are having trouble, we can switch places, Mary-dono!"

"No, I... Thank you."

He was unsure whether to take that as a yes or a no, but since she smiled and did not swap places, he decided she was continuing as is. She then glanced behind them.

“But Master Wet Man...”

Tenzou looked back as well and saw the bones catching up to the crossdresser.

“Ah! Why are you moving so slowly, Toori-dono!?”

“What!? Don’t be stupid! I ‘harvested’ enough for both of us!”

“Oh, thank you very much. Master Tenzou, we can have a carnival once we get back to the Musashi.”

...A porn game carnival sounds dangerous!

Tenzou checked to make sure one of Naito’s Magie Figurs wasn’t floating nearby, but he seemed to be in the clear. The Technohexen had left. But by then, the bones were pulling full force at the idiot’s legs.

“Toori-dono, h-hurry up and throw them away! Everything except the all-important busty blondes genre!”

“Y-you’re pretty selfish yourself, you know that!?”

When he did throw one away, the bones reached out and grabbed it.

“...”

Several of them gathered around it and began staring at it.

“Look, Tenzou,” said the idiot when he noticed. “They must have some traces of their memories from life. This is such a heartwarming scene.”

“Just keep throwing them away!!”

“Wait, you idiot! That was the silver hair genre!! Sob, sob... Y-you’re so mean...”

“Now you’re pretending to cry!?”

As soon as Tenzou shouted, a new enemy arrived from the left.

It was a large bone ape. And...

“Two of them!?”

Tenzou saw the large bone ape skeletons rushing toward them.

There were definitely two of them coming from the left.

Mary was running to his left, so she immediately attacked the one in the lead.

However...

“...!!”

Even though she severed its front right leg, it leaped around to their right side.

It was far away. It had jumped outside the reach of the short sword on Tenzou's hip.

He was also worried about the other one still coming from the left, but before it could reach Mary...

“Mary-dono!”

“Oh...right. Judge!”

As soon as he called out to her, she jumped to the right and behind him.

He immediately stepped to the left to swap places with her.

Mary attacked the one on the right with Excalibur.

Tenzou drew his short sword to deal with the left one.

“...”

He crouched down and attacked from below. As the bone ape charged in from the left, he made an upwards backhand slash.

Ninja sword fighting was originally created to strike an enemy on horseback while hiding down on the ground.

...The final training used a real horse.

He had some nice memories of his father acting as their instructor. The man had told them “Look, I'll show you how it's done. There's no need to fear the horse's legs.”, but not five seconds later, he had been lying unmoving on the ground. That had made all the trainees good and nervous.

Regardless, his training paid off here as he reached up for the attack.

“...!”

He scored a solid hit.

Mary’s attack created a sound of impact on the right, his attack created a sound of tearing on the left, the bones on the right were crushed, and the bones on the left were sliced in two.

Without eliminating the momentum of his slash, Tenzou continued running.

As he and Mary had swapped positions, he turned right to face her.

“From here on, I will take the left side.”

“Judge. Thank you very much.”

He heard a teasing whistle from the crossdresser behind them, but...

...With Naito-dono gone, I am invincible.

He nodded twice as they left the camp. They had a shallow downward slope for approximately two kilometers before reaching Magdeburg’s northwestern wall. If the cannons on the wall had still been functioning, they would only have needed to keep running while receiving covering fire. Unfortunately...

...With the Gods of War fighting west of the wall, the wall has grown silent.

The wall itself had clearly collapsed in quite a few places.

A battle had broken out there.

Without that covering fire, there was a danger of enemy pursuit as they descended the wasteland slope, so Tenzou turned to Mary to have her cast a concealment spirit spell.

“———”

That was when he saw the enemy approaching from outside the camp behind them on the right.

This was a new enemy.

It had suddenly risen from outside the camp as if in pursuit.

“A large skeleton!?”

Tenzou saw the bone giant forcefully rise to its feet.

It seemed to come together as it rose and it turned toward them once it noticed them.

It was looking only at them, so they had to react.

“Master Tenzou!”

Mary passed her Excalibur to him and quickly raised her hands to prepare a spirit spell. Tenzou meanwhile moved between her and the large skeleton.

...If it stands up and swings its arm down, I have to make a slash!

Combined with Mary’s attack, that would take off one of its arms. Then they only had to flee. Once it could no longer balance itself properly, its speed would drop.

That was why Tenzou prepared to protect Mary.

He saw the large skeleton stand tall and raise its arm.

But then he heard something being destroyed and saw the color white spread from the left of his vision.

...!? By the time he realized that was the camp, it was too late. After standing, the large skeleton had kicked up the nearby camp with its very first step. It did not directly hit them, but the cloth of the tents spread out and blocked his vision.

“Kh!”

He could not see where the enemy was attacking, so as a reliable defense, he raised Excalibur’s hilt and pointed the blade straight down. He pressed his other elbow against the back of the blade to brace against the coming blow. He had no idea how effective this would be, but...

...I’m not about to give up!

He gathered his strength and resolve while the idiot moved behind him with an intense feminine running form.

“Noooo! It’s so scaryyyy! Save meeeeeee!”

“I can’t take this seriously when you’re treating it like a joke!!”

As soon as he shouted at the idiot, the downward strike arrived, but...

“The attack is going to slip right past that defense, you know?”

With those words, the large skeleton’s right arm was instantly smashed.

Something had pierced through and knocked away the enemy’s fist and the entire camp.

Tenzou saw what had caused the destruction: Ex. Collbrande.

But it was not the one he held in his hand and he knew who had the other one.

“Mitotsudaira-dono!?”

His question was answered by an expanse of silver appearing before his eyes.

Beyond the hair spread out in the wind, he saw the gold-eyed Demi Loup-Garou. And...

“Really!? I thought I could make a nice entrance and Mito takes it from me!?”

With those words, a mass of metal fell from the sky.

The large skeleton had collapsed in front of them and it was literally crushed from above.

“Jizuri Suzaku is here to pick you up!”

The sound of impact was accompanied by a quieter sound of the landing buffer parts being removed. The camp spreading out through the sky was flattened on the ground along with the crushed bones.

Tenzou saw Musashi’s 5th and 6th special duty officers standing before him.

He saw the god of war and the silver wolf.

When they turned back with a smile, he and Mary nodded toward them.

...We’re back together again!

As soon as Naomasa gave her greeting, Mitotsudaira saw the girl remove the

buffering from Jizuri Suzaku's legs and expand the wings on its back.

There really is no affectation with her, thought Mitotsudaira as Naomasa instructed Jizuri Suzaku with words and movements of her false arm.

"This makes four people...five with me. The balance won't be great, but we should manage if it's only to Magdeburg's transport ship. ...Wait just a minute."

"Judge," said Mitotsudaira before sighing.

Beyond the camp, she could see Righteousness and Yatsufusa's backs. Those two would know they were here due to Jizuri Suzaku's appearance.

The two of them were probably trying to protect them.

She saw some damage on Righteousness. It had not reached the machine itself, but there were pieces of missing armor on the left and right.

...They must be having an intense battle.

They and their enemy were both desperate.

Next to her, Naomasa used her false arm to send the two Gods of War some hand signals.

She raised her index finger to indicate "one minute", raised her palm to say "wait", and then pointed to the Musashi.

But the idiot had his own interpretation.

"Man...no thank you...get lost? Wait a second, Naomasa. Yoshiyasu may be flat, but she's still a girl."

"That is not what she meant!" cut in Mitotsudaira. "She said to wait one minute before we return to the Musashi!"

The idiot shrank back and tossed another porn game to the initial skeleton unit gathered around the first one. Mitotsudaira was unsure if she should allow that, but...

...Honestly.

Naomasa was here and so was Jizuri Suzaku. That may not have been much, but...

...It was only a few days, but it feels like so long since I've seen her.

Mitotsudaira held Ex. Collbrande in both hands after it floated up from the fallen camp.

“Mary.”

She stood in front of the other girl.

Mary held her own Ex. Collbrande and tilted her head.

“What is it, Lady Mitotsudaira?”

“Judge.” Mitotsudaira went down on one knee and held up Excalibur. “I, Musashi Knight Nate ‘Argent Loup’ Mitotsudaira, thank you for your consideration.”

“Eh? Oh, um...”

Mary suddenly sat on the ground to put herself on eyelevel with Mitotsudaira and smiled.

“Think nothing of it. Yes.”

She placed her own Excalibur on her arm, took Mitotsudaira’s one, and held them both close.

“Did you have a good time with your mother?”

She only had one thing to say to that. Mitotsudaira also sat on the ground and did not stop her expression from softening.

“Judge. Thanks to you.”

When she reached out a hand, Mary reached out the hand not holding Excalibur.

Mitotsudaira stood up, pulling Mary up with her. And...

“My king.”

When she turned around, the crossdresser frantically hid a very full sack behind his back and shook his head.

“Wh-wh-wh-wh-what is it!? I-I-I-I-I’m definitely not hiding any porn games! Hm!?”

...What am I supposed to do about this?

Half exasperated and half impressed, she spoke to him.

And as she did, she wondered how he would react.

“I am back, my king.”

After he spoke to her, the crossdresser scratched his head and suddenly replied.

“That’s not it, Nate.”

Mitotsudaira quickly realized her mistake.

...He’s right.

It was not that she was back. There was something else she needed to say.

“Judge. ...I will continue on with you, my king.”

“I see.” He nodded. “I see.” He nodded again. “Um...When did you remove that?”

He pointed at her neck, so she brought a hand to touch it.

“Eh? Oh, um... Since IZUMO, I guess.”

“Ohhh, yeah. It wasn’t there when Naito changed your clothes, now that I think about it.”

“Y-you saw that!?”

“Don’t be silly. I didn’t *see* it! I *peeped* on it!”

She clenched her fist, but Mary nodded with a smile.

“That’s right. He was so very worried about you.”

She could only back down after hearing that. She felt heat filling her face from the neck to the cheeks, but the idiot only tilted his head.

“Hmm, if you lost it in battle, then I guess it’s my fault. How about I buy you a new one once we get back to the Musashi?”

...Eh!?

She almost nodded on reflex, but she quickly sucked in a breath. She let the cold air fill her lungs as she thought.

...I can't do that.

Her king had not given her the one she had worn before. She had chosen it herself, so...

"A wolf only wears a collar when she places it on herself to protect her pride."

Also, she thought. Horizon binds my king and me together. He will create her kingdom and I will pave the way for him.

So...

"How about you, my queen, and I...all choose it together?"

"I'm sure my sis, Asama, and some others will tag along too."

"Yes, I'm sure they will."

She agreed because arguing would not change anything.

Regardless, that settled it. She would go with him, but she would pave the way for him. And...

"Okay, all done! Hurry onto Jizuri Suzaku's arms! We're leaving!"

Naomasa's voice rang out and quickly turned east as she looked to Magdeburg.

"They're probably still having some trouble, so for now...we need to join them!"

Chapter 84: Samurai of the Sunken City

CHAPTER 84

"Samurai of the Sunken City"

There is only one thing
I must do
Point Allocation (Victory)



There is only one thing

I must do

Point Allocation (Victory)

As Magdeburg continued to flood, it was largely divided between three separate battles.

The first was against Sassa Narimasa after he entered the city through the western wall.

The second was the retreat of the siege troops after successfully destroying the south of the city and starting the flood within their fifteen minute time limit.

And the third...

“Dammit. Do you intend to seal off my attacks to the end, daughter of Honda!?”

On the eastern side of the flooded city, Shibata Katsuie and Honda Futayo confronted each other on the house rooftops as the water began to reach even that height.

Katsuie wanted to make a one-man charge on the transport ships, but Futayo stood in his way.

Futayo fought with her back to the northern cathedral. She would detect the initial movement of her opponent’s vice chancellor level sword techniques.

“...!!”

Whether it was a faint, brute strength, or a continuous barrage, Futayo focused entirely on interfering with the initial movement and continued doing only that.

Sparks flew, the clashing of blades scattered through the air, and their movement made no progress.

“What a pain in the ass!!”

Katsuie gave a yell and the sparks and clashing sounds grew all the more intense.

“———”

But he was still stuck where he was, unable to move.

The scattering light and noise simply strengthened.

Futayo focused on detecting the beginning of his speed.

Seeing through Katsuie's attacks was the key to victory.

However, the opponent before her had muscular strength far exceeding that of a human. And it was made all the worse because...

...He has more than just brute strength.

With brute strength alone, he would lose his balance and leave an opening when she deflected his attacks, but whenever her strikes stopped Kamewari, he immediately regained his balance and began his next movement.

He had the brute strength, but he used a gentler strength to instantaneously launch that brute strength.

Futayo's acceleration spell was cumulative, but Katsuie worked in a single instant. He was similar to Muneshige in that regard, but Katsuie's acceleration came from his race's natural traits instead of a spell. That meant it put little burden on his body.

Katsuie was entirely defined by his own overwhelming potential.

But, thought Futayo.

His physical abilities were his limits. He could not do anything more than his body allowed for.

That meant he would not do anything unexpected.

He would not sacrifice a leg to launch himself forward as Muneshige had done.

Yes, there is nothing to fear. I only need to react to what I see before me. Nothing strange will happen. This opponent is normal. He will not do anything odd. To sum up, Muneshige-dono was a strange individual who did odd things.

...Oh?

Did I make a mistake in there somewhere?

Well, not that it matters, she thought. Everyone from Musashi is weird, so Muneshige-dono should fit in just fine if he too is strange. They know how to look after him. I would expect no less of Musashi.

As for the present...

“Damn you!”

“Damn you.”

Futayo did not mind. She simply struck and simply pushed. She pushed back as much as her opponent pushed at her and remained at the same distance from him. Eventually, he raised the density of his attacks.

“Damn you!!”

Katsuie continued yelling.

“Damn you, damn you, damn you, damn you, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn you, damn you, damn you, damn you, damn, damn, damn, damn, you, you, you, you, damn you!”

“Damn you, damn you, damn you, damn you, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn you, damn you, damn you, damn you, damn, damn, damn, damn, you, you, you, you, damn you.”

Tonbokiri really must hate losing to go along with his rapping, she thought. And he must be quite diligent to bother saying it each and every time.

My father would not have done that. When Kazuno-sama would say the food was ready, he would ignore her and keep laughing at the divine television, so she made sure to always have a butcher’s knife handy by the kitchen pillar.

That takes me back, she thought while continuing to stop her opponent with Tonbokiri.

She pushed, struck, and deflected.

“There!”

She stopped him. She stopped him, continued stopping him, and always stopped him.

Sparks flew, the noise rang out, and they both stepped forward and moved back.

They exchanged glances and words, but none of it surpassed their movements.

As time went on, they honed their movements.

This helped her know what initial movements he would use and even let her narrow it down based on the movements of his shoulders. How his shoulder muscles moved gave her a general idea of what angle the sword would come from, so she sent Tonbokiri there.

“?”

The tactile feedback unexpectedly vanished.

Tonbokiri cut through empty air.

It happened suddenly.

Futayo saw Tonbokiri’s tip gouge into empty space.

Strange, she thought. She had definitely seen his initial movement coming, so why had the expected tactile feedback been missing?

When she perceived her enemy with her whole vision, she realized something.

“You let go of Kamewari!?”

“Say I sacrificed it. It sounds cooler.”

Sure enough, Kamewari was falling a step in front of Katsuie.

The very next moment, Katsuie grabbed Tonbokiri’s errant tip.

He pulled on it, which threw her off balance.

Katsuie moved closer to her than Tonbokiri’s tip and held the base of the blade below his arm. That prevented the blade from reflecting him. At the same time, he kicked up Kamewari, tossing it to his opposite arm.

He grabbed it and opened his mouth at close range.

“Get her, Kamewari.”

Kamewari's smashing power activated.

The air split, opened up, and burst along a horizontal line.

Futayo's split-second decision was more of a gamble than anything.

She extended Tonbokiri's shaft to launch herself backwards.

"...!!"

She escaped by leaping as far back as the bottom of the spear would allow.

Katsuie was holding the blade below his arm to avoid being cut, so the extension naturally moved away from him. And since Kamewari had been tossed up from below...

...The blade should be pointed up!

Futayo's predicted path of the smashing power became a reality along a nearly horizontal line.

That cutting and smashing power swept along just above Tonbokiri's shaft. Futayo dropped her hips down and hung from the shaft, so a few slower tufts of hair were taken off.

Still, she had dodged it.

However...

...Oh, no!

She had reached the edge of the roof and Tonbokiri was extended so she would have to pull it back to attack. Also, the longer weapon would get in the way if she tried to jump to another roof.

"You're mine, Peerless in the East!!"

Katsuie came toward her. He adjusted the position of Kamewari's blade and made a horizontal cut along Tonbokiri's shaft.

Futayo also took action. She held Tonbokiri's shaft and retracted it.

"Bind! Tonbokiri!!"

"Idiot! I'll be there before it gets back and it can't cut me when I'm past the

blade!!”

She did not care because she was not cutting her enemy.

“I am cutting the roof!”

Futayo cut the battlefield itself.

While pulling the blade back to the left, she pointed it downward and made a diagonal cut to the roof’s ridge.

...Go!!

Immediately afterwards, the roof broke in two near the center.

She had cut the very top, meaning the ridge supporting the entire roof and the straw around it.

But with its support gone, the center fell straight down with the thickness of a blanket.

The roof formed a V-shape. Katsuie was in the center so he fell down and Futayo was on the edge so she was lifted up.

“...!”

Futayo threw her shortened weapon to the opposite side of the roof.

At the same time, she jumped. She used the rising of the roof’s edge while also crouching down and straightening up again like a spring.

“—————”

She took a mighty leap.

She stretched and twisted her body in midair, jumped over Katsuie, and prepared to land on the opposite southern edge of the roof.

The center of the roof fell into the water below her.

She heard the splash and saw the straw roof spread out and flow into the water, starting from the cut she had made.

After crossing over that, she landed on the opposite end of the roof’s ridge.

Her feet seemed to stab into the straw as she placed them on the diagonally tilted end of the ridge and she had already turned around.

She then grabbed Tonbokiri from the air as it finished its own flight.

She looked to the enemy.

If Katsuie attempted to go on ahead, she would attack him from behind.

He was standing on the opposite end of the collapsed and tilted roof, but...

...He's turned my way!?

He was looking at her and his body was facing her as well.

He was not going to carelessly show her his back.

But he had been running forward, so would it have been possible to turn around that quickly on the tilted roof?

Futayo saw the answer to that question.

He had not actually turned around.

His demonic body maintained the stance from taking a large step in the other direction, but there was something odd about his pivot leg placed toward the center of the roof.

Even its ankle was applying a powerful twist to the roof.

...Is he pushing down on the center of the ridge!?

Katsuie had used his leg to help along the collapse of the roof and that was bringing the roof to a nearly vertical tilt. Also...

"I can see you just fine. That isn't up, is it?"

As he stood on the vertical roof that was now more of a wall, he bent back to look up at her.

He did everything through brute strength.

That was the proper strategy for his demonic race. He created a battlefield out of his own body's strength.

Then he sank down on the vertical roof.

He was going to move and Futayo sensed danger, so she held Tonbokiri in front of her.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!!”

In the instant, she launched the cutting power forward, Futayo saw something.

It was the night sky.

“...!?”

She saw the clouds and the Musashi floating in the sky.

She wondered how her horizontal gaze could be showing her that, but then she saw a ripple in the sky.

What looked like the night sky was actually the water’s surface.

...Is this...?

She understood now. Her own footing had grown nearly vertical and her vision was pointed down at the water.

She also knew why: Katsuie.

He had predicted the timing of her attack and stepped down on the center of the roof.

The ridge supporting the roof had broken, but the straw and other materials were still holding it together.

So when Katsuie’s side was pushed down at the center, her side also tilted.

...Oh, no!

She tried to hold her ground on the steeply tilted surface, but she saw movement in the water filling her vision. Something had broken through the reflection of the night to shoot up from below.

It was the soaked center of the roof.

Katsuie had pushed down with the foot on the edge of the roof to send the center hopping back up like a seesaw.

“...!!”

Futayo had placed a foot forward to hold her ground, but the rising center of the roof struck it from below.

And as the V-shaped roof returned to its horizontal shape, its momentum also affected her pivot foot.

She was pushed back into a sitting position.

...How careless of me!

She could breathe and, knowing only that, she moved her body forward to stand back up.

That decision saved her life.

Kamewari raced toward the previous position of her neck.

Katsuie had crossed the center of the roof to reach her.

“Tch.”

She heard him click his tongue, but it was the sound of the sword slicing the air that made her tremble.

But not from fear.

...Beautiful!

The sword strike she heard was powerful, but it was also as straight as a taut thread.

Splendid, she thought. He has so much strength, yet he does not use his sword roughly.

Futayo watched Kamewari draw a silver arc forward and back as she jumped backwards.

She stood on the edge of the roof.

The excess force of Katsuie sending the roof upwards kept the center from falling back down for a brief moment.

He used that loose balance to launch a second strike.

Futayo launched a movement of her own in response.

She kept the soles of her feet on the edge of the roof as she stood straight up and toppled backwards.

...Is she trying to fall!?

Katsuie saw his opponent remain entirely straight as she toppled backwards without bending back first.

He did not change the horizontal swing his right hand gave Kamewari.

...Uh, oh.

The line of metal raced through the position his enemy's chest had been in.

It cut through empty air.

By the time he was certain he had missed, his enemy's body lay horizontal to the roof. Like the hand of a clock, she rotated around the edge of the roof on the soles of her feet. Still standing straight, she rotated down lower than the roof.

"Is that what you're after!?"

Katsuie understood what his enemy was doing. She was not dropping down to escape.

"—————"

He heard a sound below the roof's edge.

It was the sound of Tonbokiri extending.

He knew it would hit the wall. The bottom of Tonbokiri would strike the house's wooden wall.

As she fell back and around, she would push herself back using Tonbokiri.

She would bounce back up.

Like playing her fall in reverse, she would rise once more.

He had just finished swinging Kamewari.

"Bind, Tonbokiri."

Before he could pull it back, he heard a voice.

Futayo produced the words needed to launch the cutting power.

She targeted a horizontal line along the center of her enemy's chest. She initially thought he had no way of dodging it, but...

...No, he does!

She saw Katsuie step strongly down with his right leg.

He had decided to make the center of the roof sink back down.

She was taken up and he was taken down. The rising edge of the roof tugged her upwards a bit, so Katsuie moved below her vision as he intentionally lowered himself.

...Will I make it in time!?

If her cut did not hit, he would counterattack with Kamewari and she would lose. No, she needed to make her next move, too.

She had to keep moving forward toward victory. She had to read what came next and continue moving.

With that in mind, she felt the cutting power being fired.

She wanted it to hit, but she also felt a desire for it to miss. She wanted the battle to continue like this forever. She knew that was a dangerous desire, but...

“!?”

A sudden light came from the east which was to her right.

...A cannon blast!?

At the same time, Katsuie looked and shouted to the east.

“You idiot! Don't interfere!”

His shout was accompanied by a line of light shooting between her and him.

“!?”

It burst and their surroundings grew bright.

...What is this!?

There was light, but it had not hit anything. She assumed it had failed to activate properly.

But something was destroyed after all: Tonbokiri in her hands.

The base supporting its blade contained the device that managed the activation of the cutting power.

“Overload.”

With a solid sound, that device burst from within.

Tonbokiri was broken.

“You complete moron!!”

Katsuie looked to the east. Two people could be seen on the white flagship of the M.H.R.R. fleet.

One of them was Toshiie who raised a hand in apology and the other was scratching his head.

“Dammit, Matthias!”

“Sorry, Katsuie. That was supposed to be test firing, but my timing was really bad.”

Matthias held a giant arbalest. It was colored white and black and it resembled bones.

“I was just test firing my Logismoι Óplo, Pheugos Gastrimargia.”

...A Logismoι Óplo!?

Futayo had been left in a daze by Tonbokiri’s destruction, but the term she heard was enough to quickly snap her out of it.

...Did that light come from that arbalest!?

She could guess what it did. Tonbokiri had fallen silent, but it had uttered a single word at the very last moment: overload.

Also, that weapon represented the deadly sin of gluttony.

“Does that Logismoi Óplo overload weapons, causing them to explode from within!?”

“It can be a huge problem from a friendly fire perspective, so we’ve told him not to fire it just for fun,” grumbled Katsuie. “Sorry about this. I would’ve won if that had continued, but that was an ugly way to end it. ...But now you are only an obstacle to me.”

He responded with Kamewari.

He did not activate it, but the strike had plenty of speed.

“You kept me from turning my back and continuing on. Allow me to do the polite thing and kill you.”

Katsuie pulled his right hand to the left in a horizontal line. He moved it from right to left as if pulling it in with his reversed hand.

The enemy’s neck was positioned along its path. He had no real interest in the girl, but he wondered if he should have at least asked her name. *But I wouldn’t want to make Lady Oichi jealous*, he decided.

And so he made the cut in silence.

However, Kamewari’s path suddenly changed.

Someone had struck the blade from behind. The blow had enough force to produce a metallic noise and it knocked the blade upwards.

“———!?”

Kamewari passed over his enemy’s head.

He had a new opponent behind him on the right. He looked back to the north end of the roof.

“Tachibana’s son-in-law!?”

The man wielding a metal spear slipped past Katsuie’s right side using the same motion that had pushed up Kamewari.

“Yes, but I’ve lost my inherited name for the time being.”

...What a troublesome man!

“But this is interesting!”

The Peerless of the East and of the West. He had no choice but to decide these two were too dangerous to turn his back on.

If he wanted to continue on, he had to defeat them. Matthias’ unwanted favor had just about ruined his fun, but it all worked out now that he had multiple enemies. He could enjoy this without having to hold back.

“You can take a dip first!!”

Tachibana was moving up alongside the Honda girl on the south of the roof, but Katsuie tried to send him flying with a kick.

However, his right knee was stopped by Honda. The Honda girl strongly deflected his leg with the bottom of her dead divine weapon.

Still, the attack had been lacking. It had only stopped his attack and had no real force behind it.

...Has Tonbokiri’s destruction left her shaken!?

She may have been trying not to think about it, but this would be the first time she had to fight without being able to use that cutting power. She did not know how to build up her countermeasures and tactics under those conditions, so she was hesitating.

That was why Katsuie brought back his swung sword and prepared to take care of the Honda girl.

Except a metal spear struck back the blade he was moving back.

That was Tachibana.

Tachibana then crossed paths with the Honda girl.

They switched places. From Katsuie’s perspective, Tachibana was on the left and the Honda girl on the right.



Katsuie moved Kamewari back to his right, and...

“I didn’t really want to use this!”

He drew a short sword with his left hand.

The Honda girl and Tachibana held their spears at the ready and both stepped forward at the same moment.

“———!!”

A series of rapid strikes began.

Sparks flew and the wind blew through to bind them all together.

Muneshige dealt with the lighter short sword. While it was lightweight, that allowed it to move much more quickly.

Next to him, Futayo faced Kamewari just as before, but the damage to Tonbokiri had filled her movements with some slight hesitation.

Still, neither of them let their guard down. The two of them held their side-by-side positions and focused on their respective targets.

“Ohhh!”

After an exchange of several dozen strikes, both of the Peerless powerfully deflected Katsuie’s weapons backwards simultaneously.

The force of the intense noise caused those demonic arms to spread to either side. The short sword had already broken and more of Kamewari’s surface armor was damaged than not.

But just as the two from Musashi made their attacks to pursue him, Katsuie breathed in and forcibly swung his upper body backwards.

Instead of bringing his deflected arms back forward, he swung his own upper body behind him.

He moved back which returned his arms to the position needed to launch an attack.

“Die!!”

He yelled and took action at the same moment.

He suddenly lowered his hips to a crouch.

A moment later, a speedy shell shot in from behind and passed through the spot his head had vacated.

That was an attack from Gin's Arcabuz Cruz. After both predicting it and dodging it without seeing it, Katsuie smiled.

He quickly stood back up and changed the movement of his arms for an attack from below.

"Don't think you can get me with the same trick twice!!"

A hammer flew powerfully in from directly ahead and collided with his face.

It came from Tomoe.

After Futayo had kicked her out of the way, she had monitored the state of the battle and she now stood on a roof far to the south. She used her remaining hammer as a staff.

"In other words, it will work the first time. Keep that in mind, Reine des Garous."

The silver cross had already activated behind Katsuie.

By controlling her center of gravity, the Reine des Garous had landed on the slanted roof without making a noise.

"Stab, Valkyrie Marteau."

A direct hit from point-blank range was fired into Katsuie's back.

The noise throbbed in one's gut and turned the water's surface to spray.

Katsuie's body was sent skipping along the water. He flew toward Tomoe who rested her hammer on her shoulder before raising it in preparation.

"Die, kid!!"

She made a splendid swinging strike.

But the attack's intended victim flew over it.

Katsuie had used Kamewari. The weapon had finally reached a charge, so he had activated it downwards.

"Get it, Kamewari!!"

The water exploded and the wind blasted upwards.

He flew high enough into the sky to easily clear Tomoe's head and land five rooftops over.

He was alive, but he fell to one knee and coughed up quite a bit of blood.

His body was covered in a sticky sweat that was clearly not water and his entire body shook from the blow.

However...

"Ha ha! It's been a while since I took something like that!!"

"Pipe down and eat the rest, kid."

"Not a chance. I was thrown off my pace and I can't get back into it now. My ribs were smashed to pieces. I think one's pierced my stomach. Sorry, but I couldn't possibly eat any more. Not even if some old hag asks me. So..."

He spat out the blood that had collected in his mouth and he leaped eastward, toward the Elbe River and the opposite bank.

The Reine des Garous' eyebrows rose when she saw it.

"You're running!?"

"What!? Don't be stupid! I'm leaving because I've won! It's called quitting while you're ahead! Remember that, okay!?"

"Quitting while you're ahead?"

The demonic form jumping into total darkness answered their question as he disappeared into the blackness.

"You'll die by the time you see it. So if you don't want to die...you need to get running!"

Chapter 85: Moon Goddess's Audience in the Sky

CHAPTER 85

"Moon Goddess's Audience in the Sky"



It bears light
And soars through the night sky
The people look up at it as the moon
Point Allocation (Protection)

It bears light

And soars through the night sky

The people look up at it as the moon

Point Allocation (Protection)

“I’m not hearing anything from the east anymore. Did Shibata back off?”

Narimasa raced through the city and its sky.

The Technohexen persistently attacked him from behind and, with two of them, there were no breaks in their attack.

But it would be over soon. He could see Magdeburg’s cathedral beyond the roofs up ahead.

He had to pass that cathedral.

Three transport ships were visible behind it and the M.H.R.R. warship dropped from the sky was skewered into the ground behind them.

The three transport ships were floating. The one carrying Magdeburg’s survivors was moving west, but the other two, which carried Musashi’s VIPs and the hemispheres, were not moving.

They were waiting for the return of Musashi’s chancellor and those with him, but it was more than that.

...They’re waiting for the diplomatic ships coming down from the Musashi to escort them.

Narimasa needed to board those ships and destroy everything he could get his hands on, but the ships were too high up to reach from the ground or the nearby houses.

Instead, he decided to make a straight jump from the cathedral’s roof.

“That sounds like something Shibata would think up, but oh well! ...Time for a running start!”

He needed proper footing to build up speed, so he launched himself onto the

rooftops. He leaped on top of a row of houses bordering the plaza in front of the cathedral.

Once he landed, the cathedral was directly north of him.

He moved to the roof's eastern slope to hide himself from the Technohexens' shots.

"Now, then!"

He accelerated across the straw roofs in a straight shot for the cathedral.

Narimasa ran.

The plaza below was flooded. The water was shallow, but it would still slow him down if he jumped into it.

"I doubt I have time to circle around the cathedral either."

Overhead, the Musashi's diplomatic ships were approaching the three transport ships behind the cathedral.

Once they arrived, the transport ships could escape and the Sack would be over.

That was why Narimasa had to hurry there. And to do that, he had to avoid the water.

...I need footing.

He found some. He could jump from the roof and use the stone bench in front of the cathedral as a springboard.

If he jumped to the cathedral roof from there as if bouncing forcefully off of it, he would only need to kick off the cathedral once to reach the top.

From there, he only needed to kick off the roof and jump to the transport ships. But...

"Here they come."

The Technohexens' attacks were coming, but their aim was one roof off.

Narimasa saw the opposite slope of the roof explode and tremble, so he knew

it would not reach him.

“Shaja!”

He leaped from the edge of the roof and into empty air.

By the time the roof creaked from the strain, he had already made a midair flip and stepped powerfully down on the stone bench. He only had to sink down and build up the reflexive power.

“Lily Flower!”

As soon as lily emblems blossomed on his feet, ankles, and knees, he leaped and looked to the sky.

However, he saw something there.

“An aerial ship!?”

Wind pressure reached him as he looked at the black shadow.

“That was fast! No...”

It was a Musashi transport ship.

It was not one of the ones from behind the cathedral. This one had left the Musashi and accelerated straight here. It had flown toward Narimasa like a shell.

It was a sniper shot on a massive scale.

Narimasa realized a certain fact when he saw this unavoidable attack.

...Was that attack from the Technohexen meant to keep me from looking up when I jumped!?

It had been a diversion to hide the transport ship shell.

“Are you copying us!?”

As he jumped, the transport ship hit him as a counterattack.

The sound of splitting rock and a tremor echoed around the buildings surrounding the plaza.

The nearly one hundred meter ship was instantly crushed to one third that

length and the materials and frame that pierced through the crust scattered in every direction. Those fragments stabbed into nearby houses, broke windows, and rolled and bounced through the floodwaters as a giant ripple.

The impact to the ground shook the plaza and filled the surrounding ground with a vertical tremor. The cathedral's stained glass and the surrounding buildings' shutters bent in their frames. Some of them flew out and others seemed to explode.

The ripple in the plaza's water grew to a spray and quickly filled the area with mist.

Everything was thrown outward or skyward from its proper position.

It all burst upwards.

Silence followed, only broken by the dripping of the water thrown into the air.

But new motion could be found in one spot: low in the sky. The M.H.R.R. fleet on the opposite bank from Magdeburg's eastern edge was moving south to avoid a similar attack.

However, there was more motion low above the city itself.

Two Technohexen had arrived above the center of the plaza.

The colors white and black flapped their black and gold wings above the misty plaza.

They had not let their guard down.

Their eyes were looking at the man standing on the stern of the transport ship sticking up from the mist.

It was Narimasa.

...Talk about a monster.

His gaudy appearance had led Margot to believe his nimbleness and momentum were his selling points, but...

"You gave up on reaching the top of the cathedral and made a leaping attack instead, didn't you?"

“Shaja. I break through rock to test Lily Flower – my Israfil – so I used the same technique here.”

Steam was rising from Narimasa’s body. It was partly due to the water that had splashed up onto him, but it had more to do with the blood flowing from his right shoulder and covering half his body.

His right fist was broken, his shoulder was dented in oddly, and his arm was not moving. The object sticking out from below his shoulder was likely a bone.

Regardless, he pulled a comb from his bloody vest and wiped away some blood with it.

He combed his hair and pushed his broken sunglasses to the top of his nose.

“Are we doing this?”

“You’ve already failed your mission, haven’t you?”

“Ga-chan, you probably shouldn’t provoke him.”

“Eh? I was just trying to have a normal conversation.”

Margot looked up into the sky and finally looked back down with a smile.

“Okay! There’s no helping that! Yeah, let’s stay positive!”

“Is it just me or do you two keep your issues a little too self-contained? Well, anyway...”

Narimasa sounded bored and he looked up into the sky where two large objects were flying in the east and west. One was vermilion and the other was blue. They were Jizuri Suzaku and Righteousness.

They both had a few people riding on their arms or shoulders and they were on their way to the transport ships.

“So the Gods of War would attack me if I tried to get on the transport ships now, huh?”

Narimasa leaned back to check behind him and then faced forward again.

He ignored the few clumps of his blood-smeared bangs that hung down and he stuck his unharmed hand into his pants pocket. He then kicked the transport ship he was standing on.

“Copy us too much and you’ll turn into delinquents.”

“What?”

Just as they tried to ask what he meant, a warship fell from the sky behind him and crashed vertically down where the transport ships were.

“!?”

Hashiba had not finished dropping warships.

Masazumi felt something like a wind descending from the sky.

It was a warship. The high-speed galley-type was a black-painted Dragon-class and it dropped in a straight line.

“Is it coming here!?”

It was too big to judge by eye.

Jizuri Suzaku and Righteousness had only just landed and they could not move while letting down Futayo, the idiot, and the others.

For some reason, the idiot was crossdressing.

“Waaaaah! I’m gonna die! I’m really gonna die after coming all this way!? I’m the real life version of screwing up the last jump and falling into the very last hole in an action game! Te-ro-ro-re-ro-rooon.”

Everyone glared at the idiot as he made his death sound effect, but the speed was still approaching.

“We will protect you!”

One of the descending diplomatic ships and the third transport ship rising to the east took action.

“Wait, #3! That’s too dangerous!”

Despite the warning, it was obvious why the ship carrying the hemispheres was moving to defend them.

...It’s going to hit us!

That became obvious in the instant the falling ship approached, so the two

defending ships formed a wall.

“Hurry up and get out of the way!!”

They used their armor and their own bodies to collide with it.

Wind blew and the two giant ships bent as they acted as a wall to the falling enemy ship.

The sounds of collision, scraping, and creaking continued without end.

“Judge!!”

They diverted it.

The diplomatic ship was bent and it tumbled up into the sky. The transport ship was crushed and the falling warship’s hull caused it to burst apart and roll.

The crew of both ships had evacuated and jumped to either the other diplomatic ship or the transport ship they were protecting. Jizuri Suzaku and Righteousness stood back up to help.

At the same time, the diverted enemy warship fell the rest of the way and crashed into the ground.

They were safe.

Adele sighed on the transport ship.

The most she could do was nod when Mitotsudaira asked her if she was okay and she did not have time to celebrate their reunion.

...I can't believe this.

She apologized to Mitotsudaira and looked into the sky above to see the Musashi shutting off all of the lights installed on its outer armor. That was to prevent an enemy ship from colliding with it.

...But the hemispheres.

Everyone on the destroyed transport ship and diplomatic ship had safely evacuated, but they said the hemispheres had been destroyed and abandoned.

Also...

“Ah.”

Their ship began to ascend. To keep it from being targeted again, it was rising into the sky while the remaining diplomatic ship protected it.

The transport ship carrying Guericke’s group would continue west at low altitude to meet up with Hexagone Française.

The battle was almost complete.

Magdeburg was flooded and both M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda were apparently beginning to retreat southward.

That was likely due to Shibata Katsuie leaving. That still left Sassa Narimasa, Naito, and Naruze, but the Technohexen would fly after the transport ship once they saw it moving. So...

“It’s over, isn’t it?”

As soon as Adele said that, she heard a dry but instantaneous noise.

It was the sound of struck flesh. Adele’s shoulders shook and she turned around.

“Kimi-san?”

Kimi had slapped an M.H.R.R. girl on the cheek. *Who is that?* wondered Adele.

“Um, who is that?”

“Eh? Oh, it’s me, it’s me.”

The voice led Adele and the boys working in the area to all fall to their knees in defeat.

...Well, it does look pretty good on him.

Despite that thought, Mitotsudaira looked to Kimi’s face from behind the crossdresser.

Her eyes were sharp and her lips pursed as she held the follow through of the slap.

“Foolish brother, I hear you were abducted by some giant breasts and taken on a nature tour of Hexagone Française as well as a tour of M.H.R.R.’s imprisoned emperor, but don’t you have something to say to the others?”

“Eh? Oh, right.”

The idiot held his cheek as he looked across the others and smiled.

“Thanks for bringing me back.”

It was just like him not to actually say “sorry”, so Mitotsudaira and the others nodded.

“Judge. It was our pleasure.”

Hearing that, Kimi’s expression relaxed, she sighed, and she looked to the idiot.

“From now on, you can’t go with someone just because they have giant breasts, okay?”

“Okay.”

“And you can’t assume they’re safe because they’re a wife, okay?”

“Okay.”

“And even if they use a high-class manner of speech-...”

“W-wait, Kimi! This is my mother you’re talking about, so don’t reject everything about her!!”

“Heh heh heh. I see you’ve become a nice happy family again, Mitotsudaira.”

Mitotsudaira hated that she could not deny it.

“But that’s fine,” said Kimi before letting out a deeper sigh.

She wrapped her hands around the idiot’s head and gently pulled him close.

“Are you okay? Were you scared? Were you violated, imprisoned, broken, and brainwashed?”

“Sis! Sis! If I was brainwashed, would I really answer ‘yes’?”

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, you’re surprisingly level-headed. Anyway...”

Kimi looked to Mitotsudaira and shrugged.

“I hear you had Mitotsudaira and the others protect you. Isn’t that right, foolish brother?”

“Eh? Oh, yeah. Nate apparently had a lot of fun. But...how should I put it? I feel like you and I went there a long time ago, sis.”

...Eh?

Mitotsudaira tilted her head while Kimi nodded and asked a question.

“Did you get any candy?”

“Yeah. Nate was freaking out when she pulled out a huge chunk of sugar candy.”

“Wh-why were you watching that!?”

I hope he wasn’t told what lets you remove that, she thought just as Kimi narrowed her eyes in her direction.

“You child.”

“Wh-what does that mean!?”

She did not know how Kimi knew, but it would be insanely hard to find out when it would mean asking Kimi or her own mother. *What am I supposed to do about this?* she wondered while looking around.

“Hm? What’s the matter, Asama?”

“Eh? Oh, I just got a message from Naito and Naruze who are still down below dealing with Sassa Narimasa. They say something’s bothering them.”

Which was...

“The Musashi sent us the same information in a report from Suzu-san, but that last warship? Well, it was a stealth ship. For some reason.”

In front of the cathedral, Naruze looked up to the Musashi even though Narimasa remained on the transport ship wreckage sticking up from the ground.

The eight ships had shut off their external lights because they had entered full visual alert mode. They did not do that often, but there was a reason to do it

now.

...Because that previous warship was a stealth ship.

It had suddenly dropped down, which was clearly different from the previous ones. Naruze and Margot were always flying, but it had appeared suddenly even for them.

“When a ship is in stealth, it’s hard to detect even for Bell-san.”

Naruze nodded in agreement with Margot, but she asked another question in her heart.

...What is going on?

Why had that one ship been using stealth?

She initially guessed they had used the non-stealth ships first so everyone would let their guard down. Then the stealth ship would fall as their real attack.

But if so, they would have used it earlier. The diplomatic ship that had acted as a wall had descended straight down from overhead, so it would always have been in the way of a warship dropping nearly vertically.

So...

“———!?”

Naruze realized Narimasa had jumped. Not only that, but his jump took him southeast instead of toward the cathedral.

Margot looked up in surprise and fired after him, but he paid it no heed. He simply ran across the rooftops with his injured right arm fluttering behind him.

Naruze heard Margot moving her wings a little to adjust her position in midair, but...

...Eh?

Naruze muttered a question as she looked around the area.

“Margot, um?”

She asked her question.

“Why is the M.H.R.R. fleet falling back to the southeast?”

All of a sudden, silence surrounded them. The sounds of shellfire and fighting remained, but they were growing quieter and more distant.

“Ga-chan, the enemy is retreating, aren’t they?”

They are, thought Naruze as she looked up in surprise.

She had figured out what seemed so off to her.

“If M.H.R.R. is leaving the battlefield, why did they send in that stealth ship? A surprise attack victory now would be meaningless!”

The air seemed to answer her.

She heard a sound. She heard it once and then it continued again and again without end.

“A pulse!?”

“Wait, wait, wait, wait. I can’t believe this. That’s a ley line reactor running out of control.”

Sakai stood from the bench on Musashino’s vertical deck.

Standing next to him, “Musashi” frowned and looked to the ground which was located behind her.

She nodded in silence a few times, but then looked to Sakai.

“We will prepare to ascend at full speed. Should we wait for the transport ship to arrive? Please make a decision, Sakai-sama. Over.”

“Huh? But I’m not the one with the highest authority here.”

“No one else is conveniently around. Over.”

“I see,” he said. “I suppose you’re right.”

The pulsation continued all the while, so he asked a question.

“How long until the explosion?”

“Based on the information received from K.P.A. Italia, about one minute. Over.”

“Then we don’t even have time to break it apart or extinguish it. ...There’s no way we can make it in time.”

So...

“We can wait until the transport ship arrives, ‘Musashi’-san. The lead teacher can’t leave without the students.”

“M-Makiko-san! What’s this about a ley line reactor running out of control!? What’s going on!?”

“Oh, sorry. I’m a little busy eating this soba. Can it wait?”

“Waaaah! I thought I could finally save money on dinner now that the school cafeteria is open at night, but instead I’m going to die here!”

“Calm down, calm down, Mitsuki. You’re gonna die, after all.”

“Those sentences don’t go together at all! How am I supposed to calm down!?”

“Well.” Oriotorai devoured her bowl of soba with chopsticks as she spoke. “You’ll calm down if you eat something. That’s how it works.”

Two transport ships and a diplomatic ship began a quick ascent.

The one carrying Guericke and Tomoe was preparing to leave Magdeburg.

The one carrying the Musashi group was on its way to the Musashi with the diplomatic ship.

The two of them were working to leave the city as quickly as possible, but they lacked the speed to put enough distance between them and the coming blast.

They could still see the fallen warship below them and they could also see the silver cylinder that had spilled from the broken armor.

That was the dragon line reactor. The metal cylinder was three meters long and over a meter wide. It was surrounded in some faint light and it was the cause of the pulsation in the ley lines.

“A radius of only five kilometers is more than enough to blow us away!”

Masazumi shouted and panic filled all of those on the deck, including the ones who had only just returned.

Asama kept a divine transmission link with the Musashi with voice input as the standard.

Asama: “W-wait! What is this!? What in this world is this!? A ley line reactor!?”

Novice: “A ley line reactor? No, it’s called a dragon line reactor. You didn’t know that?”

Almost Everyone: Discussing this glasses boy’s attitude.

Novice: “Wh-what!? I’m not allowed to correct you!?”

Asama: “A-anyway, what is going on!? The thing that made Mikawa go boom was just kind of clunked down in front of us, so we’re all a little ‘huh’!?”

Mal-Ga: “Why do you sometimes get these bursts of energy like this?”

Marube-ya: “Hello! This is the Musashi! Anyway, anyway, I have a request!”

Gold Mar: “Hm? What is it?”

Marube-ya: “Judge. Well, you see? Could your transport ship shield us from the blast?”

Flat Vassal: “Aaaand here it is! I knew this was coming!”

Marube-ya: “No, I’m serious, I’m serious! You can even do it for free! Just make sure the Musashi survives! Isn’t self-sacrifice great? I’ll write a book about you after you die, okay? It’ll be called ‘The Slowpokes who Became a Shield’ and all the royalties will go to me!! Don’t worry! I’ll make back five times what we lose!”

Asama: “Sorry, I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that, so can you try asking again?”

Marube-ya: “Oh, sure. You can go be our shield and die, okay!?”

Vice President: “That’s worse than before!!”

But as they shouted back and forth, someone looked up in surprise.

It was Satomi Yoshiyasu inside Righteousness, which had already dropped its

damaged parts to the deck.

“Where’s Yoshiyori and Anne!?”

“I’m here.”

A white God of War came up alongside the transport ship from diagonally below. Righteousness’s shoulders relaxed, but then she gave another shout.

“Then where’s Anne!?”

Adele looked behind the cathedral that was already far below them. She saw the nature park filled with the wreckage of the enemy warship, but...

...The Palais-Cardinal was sitting near there before.

It seemed to have been waiting for someone to arrive, but...

“She’s...not there?”

There was no longer anything in that spot, so Adele breathed a sigh of relief.

...She must have gone toward Hexagone Française. Her God of War can fly.

But, she thought. The Hexagone Française fleet is well within range of the blast.

She now knew why M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda had retreated so quickly.

Hashiba’s true goal had been to destroy Magdeburg and wipe out the VIPs with the dragon line reactor.

Attacking early had held the VIPs in Magdeburg and invading further into the city had forced Hexagone Française to charge in.

M.H.R.R. had retreated because they had known what was coming, but the bone warriors had held Hexagone Française there and the dragon line reactor would obliterate it all.

Shibata Katsuie and Sassa Narimasa had continued fighting within the city, but that had likely been to hold everyone there.

“But...”

What do we do? wondered Adele.

Knowing the enemy's intentions would not change the course of events.

The audible pulsation was growing faster and it would eradicate everything within five kilometers once it reached its limit.

So she turned toward the others, thinking they had to get moving.

"Is there anything we can do!?"

As soon as she yelled her question, the warship that had carried the dragon line reactor suddenly moved.

The reactor had spilled out from the broken deck, but it had just shaken unnaturally.

"Eh?"

Once they noticed, everyone looked down along with Adele.

...Is that...!?

The reactor was moving. It had no legs of its own, but it rose as if something were lifting it.

"Anne!?"

Adele heard Righteousness's shouting voice.

"What are you doing!?"

Anne's mind was foggy, but she still knew what she was doing.

At first, she had thought something had rudely woken her. It had been a surprising awakening just like someone pounding on the blanket just as she was finally drifting into a peaceful slumber.

She had been woken like that in the hospital before. When had that been?

...I believe it was when the Reine des Garous brought her daughter.

This was different, but it was true the fall of the warship had reverberated through her. By the time she had woken and turned around, the dragon line reactor had spilled to the ground and she knew what its pulsation would bring.

It was going to erase everything.

Based on the report from K.P.A. Italia, the pulse would grow quicker, reach its peak, and then explode. Its effective range was five kilometers, so it would obliterate both the Musashi overhead and the Hexagone Française fleet to the west.

She had to do something.

Everything she knew was here and it was about to be erased.

“I can’t allow that.”

The many people here had been brought this far by her.

Her brother, his wife, their companions, their subordinates, their military strength, their national strength, the course of events in Europe, the history of the world, Musashi, and everything else had all reached this point thanks to her to some degree or another. And...

“I had thought I could leave the next generation to them.”

She could not allow that to go to waste.

She could not allow everything she had done to go to waste.

“Luynes.”

The six wings on her back spread. She had never flown before, so...

“Help me. I will send you my will, so you move me.”

And...

“Let’s spend my final moments taking a stroll through the sky. But...are you prepared for this?”

“Testament. I am your maid, after all.”

She heard that and the information she wanted arrived.

Dragon Dog: “Mind synchronization complete. Estimated time to explosion: 32 seconds. Ascending slightly to the northwest at the Palais-Cardinal’s full speed. The dragon line reactor will detonate at the point we reach after thirty-two seconds.”

ANA: “There aren’t any cities down below there?”

Dragon Dog: “I have already checked, Lady Anne. I had hoped to crash into Hashiba’s forces, but they have already moved too far away for that.”

ANA: “You really are perfect.”

Dragon Dog: “Testament. Thank you very much. But Lady Anne, are you feeling...?”

“Yes,” agreed Anne.

She was feeling a chill.

She had no body, but she felt like something was vanishing away. The chill felt like her body was turning to sand and dispersing, starting from the back. She honestly did not know if she would last another thirty seconds, but...

ANA: “Don’t worry. This just means I still have something that can disappear. So fly, Luynes. I’ll send you my will. I’ll send you onward with the strongest will in the world.”

Yes. That’s right.

ANA: “How much do you think this bedridden girl looked up into the sky? I’ll show you the answer with my will.”

The Palais-Cardinal gathered light in the six wings opened toward the sky and then slammed them toward the ground.

A great sound tore into the air and its silver body was launched skyward.

The people on the battlefield saw the arcing line of light race toward the night sky.

It was too fast to follow with one’s eyes.

One had to turn their head or bend backwards to keep up with its speed.

It broke through the air a few times on the way, producing loud booms as it did, and the silver line stabbed into the night sky.

Then a voice arrived via divine transmission.



Luynes

“Remember this, everyone. This is who I am in the moment I am used up. I simply protected you all until I was used up.”

Yes.

“And by using myself up to the very last drop...I will win.”

A quiet laugh followed as the voice rose into the sky as a line of light.

But even if they escaped the direct explosion, there was still a blast of wind and a shockwave.

That was why everyone needed to distance themselves from that moving light. The transport ship had reached the Musashi and Yoshiyasu had left the Righteousness, but her eyebrows were raised.

“Why!? And after you waited so long to meet your brother, the king!”

Everyone around her held their breath and Yoshiyasu covered her face with her hands to block her vision.

“Why won’t you think about the people you’re leaving behind!?”

“Yoshiyasu, make no mistake here.”

Yatsufusa stood to Yoshiyasu’s right.

“She isn’t leaving you behind. She is seeing you off and then leaving.”

He paused for a breath and kept his eyes on the sky.

“So look, Yoshiyasu. That is what she wishes of us.”

Everyone around them raised their voices as if to agree or respond. The warriors, the ship’s crew, the workers, and everyone else looked up to the northwest.

“Look.”

They pointed to the silver line rising into the sky.

“It looks like an arrow fired into the night sky.”

Anne saw everything as she ascended.

She could feel her entire body shaking as she collided with and tore through the air, but Luynes corrected her vision, allowing her to see everything below.

At first, it was only the area around the city, the river, and the forest.

But as she moved higher, the city was only one portion of the scenery, the forest became an expanse of trees leading to the mountains, and the meandering river connected the two.

The world simply spread out below her.

How far does it go? she wondered in her fading consciousness.

There's so much I don't know.

...Higher.

If she moved higher, she would be able to see even further.

...Higher.

She urged herself even higher. After all, there was something she still could not fully see.

...The place I spent so much time.

Hexagone Française was located to the west.

She had never had a bird's eye view of it before, but she could mostly tell. Even at night and even below the cloudy sky, the world was not void of light.

Luynes corrected her vision to brighten what she could see. Making it look like daytime would have been overkill, but...

Dragon Dog: "I apologize for being so presumptuous."

Yes. Making it dimly lit is just right. You really are perfect.

...This is amazing.

The land visible from the sky was just like the large map at the academy.

She saw the coastline, the mountain ranges, and the locations of the villages.

The map she had seen while in bed had contained the provisional national borders, but the world spread out below her had nothing of the sort.

...Oh.

Far to the west, she saw the large darkness that indicated a forest and she saw the lights of a village beyond it.

She recognized it. It was a place she had checked on the map so very often in Paris.

...Yes.

I briefly stayed near that forest to recuperate.

The young feudal lord there had been weak and unreliable and he had supposedly gone missing after leaving to hunt the Reine des Garous who was a threat to the locals.

She had been the one to give him advice at the time, but she had worried he had reached a mistaken conclusion about his relationship with the Reine des Garous. Also...

...Yes.

She could see to Hexagone Française's northern coast. She saw IZUMO and a collection of lights beyond it.

...That's Paris.

She had spent most of her time in a hospital bed, but she had been surrounded by a friend, trustworthy companions, and a rapidly growing brother. Her friend had had a child and her brother had come to her for advice concerning his love life. She had found it a bother at the time, but the incident with the Reine des Garous had been the same.

She was apparently doomed to be forever unpopular.

With that thought, she smiled bitterly in her mind and looked down below.

She saw everyone there: the Hexagone Française formation and the Musashi.

Luynes's corrections zoomed in and brightened her vision, so she could see the *Lourd de Marionnette* unit, the *Belle de Marionnettes*, the Three Musketeers, the Mouri series, and...

...The Reine des Garous.

That woman was indeed there. She was looking up at Anne with the usual smile. It was the same smile as when she had been urged to tell stories about the forest. The *signe cadre* by her hand was likely connected to “him”.

She did not like going out much, so Anne was impressed she had come out for this.

The girl with the Musashi group who looked exactly like her save for the chest would be her daughter.

By letting her daughter inherit Mito Matsudaira, she had hidden her identity as the Reine des Garous. By sending her daughter to Musashi, she had meant to place the girl beyond the reach of Hexagone Française’s problems, but...

...Who would have thought Musashi would try to conquer the world.

That was a grave miscalculation, thought Anne. But it must been a lot of trouble for her.

Regardless, the girl was looking and acting wonderfully now.

“I’m glad.”

The girl would not know how the Reine des Garous had occasionally worried about her since sending her to Musashi. Or that, after beating her down in Bizen, she had returned to her true home and spent a few days there worrying.

When she had returned, she had said the following with a troubled look on her face: “I found a wonderful king that child would want to serve, but...yes, I screwed up a bit. I hope he finds that girl as a king driven by a powerful will that lives on.”

Had that worked out?

Regardless, the Reine des Garous gained a new generation just like I did.

So...

...I will protect them.

She looked to her brother and those other important people and she thought about a great variety of things, but...

...I will protect them all.

As she thought and tried to ascend further, Anne realized something.

Her body had stopped in midair. Also...

Dragon Dog: “Congratulations, Lady Anne. ...We have arrived. Our synchronization has given you the same thought speed as a *Belle de Marionnette*, so you have about thirty seconds of life left.”

ANA: “You really are perfect.”

Then, Anne saw it all.

Anne felt as if she could spread her arms and embrace the world. The light and figures in that world were all the things she had created.

All she saw were the things she had gained.

Family.

Friends.

Companions.

Neighbors.

The cities, the towns, the roads, the fields, the fads, the conversations, and everything else. The new age of Hexagone Française and its relationships were things she had been pulling forward for so long and had carried this far.

She would not let it go to waste. As long as she was still here, she would not let anyone ruin what she had done.

“———”

She saw everyone important to her looking up at her.

She looked at each and every one of them and their gazes.

“Yes.”

I lived my life well enough to bring them all here.

The people I protected and took with me have all come here.

I’m glad.

She could hear a pulse.

It did not come from the dragon line reactor. It was the beat informing her of her own end.

As she listened to that slowed sound, she felt a smile in her mind.

And as soon as that beat ended, she saw something out of the corner of her vision.

Eight pillars stood from the horizontal sky like a temple floating on the clouds.

...That's taking it a little far.

As she thought that, light enveloped everything.

ANA: "Hey, Luynes."

Dragon Dog: "What is it, Lady Anne?"

ANA: "It's strange. I feel warm now. I wonder why."

Dragon Dog: "Well, the simplest explanation is that the machine has been heated more than necessary by accelerating beyond its limits."

ANA: "You really, truly are perfect."

Dragon Dog: "Testament. Thank you very much, Lady Anne."

A sun was born in the sky.

The blast opened a hole in the dark clouds, the hole quickly spread, and the object beyond the sky came into view.

What was that object in the dark heavens?

"The moon," someone muttered. "The moon is shining on the sun."

Katsuie looked up at the round clearing in the night sky and the moon visible there.

"That's one hell of a girl."

Without bothering with treatment for his injuries, he stood on the deck of a warship quickly moving southeast with Kamewari stabbed into the deck in front of him.

He jerked his chin up toward the moon.

“Remember this, all of you. She was from our generation and she protected Hexagone Française down to her very last breath. And that means...”

He laughed quietly.

“I’m fine since I have Lady Oichi, but the rest of you were rejected by her.”

The blast sent the wind blowing into the distance and that wind swept across a wide range.

The forest directly below was flattened and blown away, but the trees consumed the wind and prevented the blast from racing across the surface. Instead, the blast pushed outward through the sky.

The air was pushed, mist rose from many different areas, rain fell, and in the Magdeburg region...

“Hey, you idiot. The wind’s coming.”

The wind that bent and shook the trees also whipped at Terumoto’s coat as she spoke to Exiv.

But then she looked up at him.

“———”

She was briefly left speechless, but then she removed her coat.

“Everyone can see you, idiot.”

She placed the coat over his head like a hood.

She was hiding his body with clothing, yet Exiv did not resist. With his face hidden on either side, he finally lowered his head and no longer held back.

“...”

“Look up, idiot. Look at that.”

A tremor filled Terumoto's voice and she grabbed his hand.

Holding hands, the two of them looked up at the moon in the center of the night sky.

Next to the moon, eight pillars were positioned above the clouds.

Terumoto spoke as she viewed those pillars and the heavens.

"We..."

She sent her trembling voice to the moon floating in the sky.

"We were glad to have you with us."

Chapter 86: Those Waiting on the Path Ahead

CHAPTER 86

"Those Waiting on the Path Ahead"

What is the difference
Between your heart's point of compromise
And its destination?

Point Allocation (Focus on the Future)



What is the difference

Between your heart's point of compromise

And its destination?

Point Allocation (Focus on the Future)

The Musashi was preparing to “blast off” from its vertical orientation as the transport ship from Magdeburg docked on it. At almost the same moment, wind began to blow through the sky and the clouds dispersed.

On the transport ship, Asama adjusted the settings of her divine transmission connection to the Musashi.

...A lot has happened.

She started by trying to keep a positive outlook.

“Right.”

Countless feelings welled up in her heart. She decided not become a prisoner to them but also not to stop them.

She was well aware she could not say a word as she walked toward the lighter that would take them down to Tama. The diplomatic port surrounding them was filled with the commotion and light of their docking.

...Let's see...

She wanted to pull along the others on the transport ship. She did not have an official position, but that meant she had more freedom here.

“Um...”

Just as everyone turned toward her, she noticed someone standing on the edge of the transport ship's deck.

“Toori-kun?”

She realized he was staring up into the night sky.

Kimi was holding his hand, so she thought he would be fine. He also had Mitotsudaira behind him, but some worry remained in her heart.

However...

“Asama.”

Still crossdressing and looking up to the moon, he spoke to her.

“I wonder if she had fun.”

She answered him on reflex.

“No.”

Asama felt everyone focus on her in response to her answer.

...But I have to say no.

Saying Anne had had fun would have been best.

It was a way of showing her thoughts for the deceased.

But if she answered one way or the other, it would accept her passing. And that it had happened in a way closely related to them.

...And that would definitely make him sad.

She could not allow that. Toori of course understood that as well, but he probably did not know how to stop himself as he found himself empathizing with what he saw happen before his eyes.

That was why he had asked her about Anne. He had asked someone with knowledge of Shinto, of its funereal ceremonies, of spirits, of life, and of the afterlife.

He had asked if Anne had had fun.

...I'm sorry.

He had the ability to think about anyone without any kind of favoritism or discrimination, so she wanted to let him do that. But...

“No.”

She answered while reminding herself that he had asked her because this was her duty.

“Anne-san protected everyone like she always did.”

So...

“Did she protect you too, Toori-kun?”

Asama saw Kimi squeeze his hand and that may have been why he was able to say what he did.

“Oh,” he said. “I guess I should be thanking her then.”

He quickly looked down from the moon.

“I’ll repay you for that someday, so thanks!”

He was looking to the future instead of into the past. He turned toward Asama – no, toward everyone – and gave his usual smile, even if it was weaker than normal. Seeing that, Asama could sigh and look behind her.

Everyone was gathered on Tama’s port and deck: Horizon, Shirojiro, Heidi, Noriki, Ohiroshiki, Hassan, Itoken, Nenji, and Persona-kun. After seeing them all, Asama turned back toward Toori and the others there.

“Hurry up, everyone!”

She managed to speak the same as always thanks to her training as a shrine maiden.

They all started forward while worrying over each other.

“Hey.”

The idiot descended toward the Musashi first.

Up ahead, they could see the familiar surface of the Musashi and the people waiting for them. And...

“Welcome back, everyone.”

A silver-haired figure took a step forward from the waiting group.

It was Horizon.

As Asama wondered what this was about, the approaching girl gestured toward Toori.

“Toori-sama, come over here a moment.”

Eh? thought Asama as Toori jogged over.

He stopped in front of Horizon, tilted his head, and asked what was going on. Horizon began by raising her right hand.

When the crossdresser realized she was preparing a slap, he leaned back and held his hands out to stop her.

“Holllld it, Horizon! I was just hit by my sis earlier!”

“Oh?” asked Horizon. “Then you have two options.”

She stuck a hand into the space behind her and the idiot realized what that meant.

“N-not the Logismoi Óplo! Anything but that!”

“Judge. That would be the lighter option. Here.”

She pulled something out of thin air.

“This is a bowl full of seaweed. ...Now, make a joke.”

“Eh? I-isn’t this a bad time for adlibbing!? I don’t think it would last long!”

...She sure is strict.

Asama began to agree with him, but...

...Our shrine worships an entertainment god, so at least we have an understanding about this kind of thing.

But as she watched, Horizon glared up at him.

“Oh? And you call yourself an entertainer? My emotion sensors are telling me this entertainer is afraid.”

“W-wait, wait, wait, Horizon.” The idiot held the bowl in his arms. “The others have some things they can tell you later, but... Hey, Neshinbara! You have something important to tell Horizon, don’t you? Explain that.”

“Judge.”

Neshinbara stepped forward.

“You leave me no choice,” he began. “We are about to pass through P.A. Oda territory to meet up with Qing-Takeda for the history recreation of the Battle of Mikatagahara. That’s how we’ll travel from Mikawa to Sagami on the way to Edo.”

“How is that important to me?”

“You don’t get it?” asked Toori. “In the actual historical battle, the head of Matsudaira was so scared he crapped his pants while running away.”

Asama heard the idiot tell Horizon to listen carefully.

“I’ll take your place for that, okay!? Yeah, you can leave it all to me, Horizon! ... I’ll help you with your history recreation!”

...This is getting weird again.

As Mitotsudaira thought to herself, she saw Horizon tilt her head beyond the idiot.

“No, I don’t need you to do that.”

“C’mon, Horizon! Don’t be embarrassed! You can leave it all to me! To me! That’s right... I’ll crap myself so hard for you! Yeah, that’s what this means.”

“Um, chancellor, where did this sense of duty come from?”

The idiot began dancing to ignore that comment, but Horizon was still tilting her head beyond him. She then stuck a hand into the empty space behind her.

“If that is the issue, then I believe this will suffice.”

She pulled out a white wooden box labelled “#2 Collection Box”.

“This is the stool test for the school trip, but I believe it will suffice as an interpretation.”

“Eh?”

The idiot and everyone from the transport ship group froze in place.

Horizon then spoke to all of them.

“As our teacher explained during homeroom the other day, she has set the

deadline at nine o'clock. ...Oh, that is only two minutes from now. All of the samples are to be collected by then, but do you have yours?"

...Um, uh?

The trouble Asama had caused on the ascending transport ship was proving useful after all. They had the results with them, but...

"W-wait, Horizon. Over here, over here. U-um... Please look the other way, everyone! W-we need to do this somewhere more private!"

The girls of the transport ship group frantically pulled Horizon down below the transport ship's lighter.

They all quickly placed the small white paper bags in the box.

"Now then, everyone. Shall I shake the box to mix them up?"

"H-Horizon? No pulling one out like a lottery! No saying 'Oh? The winner of our special prize is Asama-sama'!"

"Why would you use my name!?"

Meanwhile, Naomasa brushed a hand through her hair.

"Uh, oh. I forgot to write my name on mine. Um, can I check real quick?"

"Eh? I-I forgot to write my name, too!"

Naomasa looked Adele in the eye.

"You didn't use a dog's, did you?"

"Oh, yeah..." groaned the others.

They all nodded and Asama gave the deepest nod of all.

"Adele, didn't you do that in elementary school and ended up in the hospital for a week because of all the crazy things they found in it? There were even some things they shouldn't have found in a human, so they just about sterilized the entire school."

"Yeah, that was a valuable lesson ...T-to be clear, I didn't do it this time."

At that point, the idiot walked up. The girls shrieked and backed away, but he looked more concerned than anything.

“U-um, I don’t have a set, so does anyone have a spare!?”

“Judge.” Horizon nodded, pulled a rice bowl and chopsticks from empty air, and handed them to him. “Please place it in here and deliver it to our teacher. Don’t ask me what will happen then, though.”

“Nwohhhh! Talk about difficult material! And wait. Did you submit a sample too, sis?”

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, a perfect sister would never do that! Sisters are given a free pass!”

“But Kimi, this one right there has your name on it.”

Kimi instantly erased her own name and wrote “Asama 2” in its place.

“Eh!? Wh-why am I submitting two!? I’m not that hard a worker!”

What kind of person would do that? wondered Mitotsudaira, but she held her tongue for fear of becoming another victim.

Kimi then nodded twice and placed her hands on Asama’s shoulders.

“This is your duty, Asama. A shrine maiden is meant to help out her shrine’s supporters.”

“Not like this!”

“Oh, c’mon. This girl keeps lecturing me over the most trivial things. What are you, my mom? Oh, but you are! You’re my Asamom! ...Oh, look.”

A small commotion broke out when Kimi stuck her hand inside the chest of Asama’s shirt.

While everyone argued about a number of things, Adele and Naomasa quickly wrote their names on their samples and returned them to the box.

Meanwhile, the idiot scratched his head and spoke to Horizon.

“By the way...”

Everyone tilted their heads and he asked her a question.

“Are you giving a sample, too?”

“W-wait a minute, my king!”

Everyone was shocked by that question and Mitotsudaira stepped forward.

“I can’t believe you! You can’t ask that, my king! That’s clearly entering the realm of perversion!”

“But kids love poop jokes. ...Is that really not how it works?”

“Judge,” confirmed Mitotsudaira and those behind her. “Just so you know, there are things girls don’t like to show off to others!”

“Oh, sorry. I don’t really have anything like that myself...”

“Now that you mention it, I suppose you don’t.”

Mitotsudaira hung her head and the girls behind her began accusing her of being beaten right off the bat, but she felt there was little she could do up against what felt like a law of the universe.

Meanwhile, Horizon gave the crossdresser an expressionless look.

“What is this, Toori-sama? Why would you bring that up?”

“Judge.” The idiot nodded obediently and placed his hands on her shoulders. “You’re right. I was wrong to be curious about that. ...Yes, girls don’t poop. And I don’t do it right now since I’m crossdressing. Isn’t that how it works, Horizon!?”

Horizon expressionlessly tilted her head.

“What are you talking about, Toori-sama? There is not a girl alive that does not poop. Even I had a healthy bowel movement this very morning.”

“Nwohhhhhh! This girl really knows how it’s done! She really does!”

“Heh...heh heh heh. You have real fortitude, Horizon. I’ve fallen for you all over again!”

Kimi gave Horizon a thumbs up and the others hung their heads, unsure what to do.

But then...

...Ah.

The deck shook below their feet. The Musashi began to sink down, but...

“Musashi is about to launch itself again...and then leave M.H.R.R., isn't it?”

As if to answer that question, the Musashi shot skyward with a great sound and impact.

After breaking through the clouds, the Musashi's eight ships took a shallow ballistic trajectory in a south-southwest path above the clouds.

Once they shifted from gravitational acceleration to inertial cruising, their speed was high and stable.

Masazumi and a few others remained on Tama's diplomatic deck. The Magdeburg transport ship they had arrived on was positioned atop Musashino's bow so they could claim they were being “towed” not “launched”.

“So we're being ‘towed’ or ‘led’ until we leave M.H.R.R., huh?”

That allowed M.H.R.R.'s Protestant principalities to say they had escorted a troublesome ship outside of M.H.R.R. territory.

It was all sophistry, but with the M.H.R.R. Protestants' reputation behind it, the M.H.R.R. Catholics would have a hard time interfering.

Currently, they were cruising along the Eastern European provisional border between M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda's Hashiba territory, but...

...This will get us to the Seto Inland Sea.

The Musashi had to reach Qing-Takeda territory.

But P.A. Oda was located between M.H.R.R. and Qing-Takeda. That meant they had to use the Seto Inland Sea to reach the Kii Peninsula which was the territory of Matsunaga Hisahide of P.A. Oda.

While Matsunaga's territory belonged to P.A. Oda, it was originally of the Safavid Turks and not the Ottoman Turks that were P.A. Oda's main force. The Safavid dynasty had fallen to the Ottomans, but Matsunaga controlled the remnants of the dynasty and the various tribes from the area.

The Ottomans were in the north and the Safavids in the south, so a provisional border cut east to west between them.

If they crossed that border from west to east, they would reach Mikawa.

“Then we’ll fight the Battle of Mikatagahara against Qing-Takeda before continuing on to Kantou.”

After Masazumi verbally reconfirmed their plans, a red light shot down from Musashino’s bow. It was a marker used to show the route they were taking.

They were close to the Seto Inland Sea now.

Thick clouds covered the sky and a hint of salt hung in the air.

...Probably just a minute or two more.

She looked around and saw Ariadust Academy’s flag being raised on each ship.

...I guess that’s for the history recreation of Naruse Masayoshi during the Battle of Mikatagahara.

The history recreation they were planning for resulted in a great defeat for the Matsudaira forces at the hands of Takeda Shingen and it was known as one of Matsudaira’s three great crises.

The damage taken during the retreat was especially great. To allow the head of the Matsudaira clan to escape, some of his skilled commanders had attacked and others had acted as body doubles and been killed.

Naruze’s name came from the Naruse clan. Naruse Masayoshi had been a skilled commander for the Matsudaira clan, but it was said he had held the Matsudaira flag, attacked the enemies as a body double, and been killed.

...But after our discussion with Yoshitsune, Naruze doesn’t need to go through with that history recreation.

Takeda Shingen died during the Battle of Mikatagahara, so this would be an important history recreation for Qing-Takeda. For that reason, they needed to work together and overcome it together. And...

“Once we reach Edo, we’ll modify the Musashi at Kantou IZUMO. We’ll gain more attack power and begin actively negotiating with the Kantou nations.”

Masazumi turned her back on the sky and looked behind her. Most of the others were already rushing off for the various tasks needed for gravitational

cruising, but some remained. She spoke to one of those.

“What do you think, Neshinbara?”

“Well...”

Masazumi saw Neshinbara nod as he typed on his sign frame keyboard.

“What would you like to hear first?”

She spoke her thoughts aloud while thinking she would be spoiled if she actually got an answer.

“What influence do you think the Sack of Magdeburg will have?”

“Judge. For Hexagone Française, their clear understanding of Anne of Austria’s dying wish will go a long way toward raising morale. Her final moments will mean the most to her brother and friends. As for the M.H.R.R. Protestants, the damage to Magdeburg should have been kept within the expected bounds. But...”

“The dragon line reactor?”

“Judge.”

Neshinbara started typing faster. He summoned Michizane onto his shoulder and had the sign frame’s movements synchronized with his eyes.

“I would like to say Hexagone Française, Musashi, and the Protestants managed to show off our hard work, friendship, and courage by forcing the M.H.R.R. Catholics to retreat, but the dragon line reactor changes that.”

“It means they didn’t leave because they lost. It was a strategic withdrawal to escape the reactor.”

“Judge. Of course, the Protestants couldn’t exactly win the Sack, so that does work out.”

But...

“How many dragon line reactors does Hashiba...no, P.A. Oda have? And how long does it take to produce them? That’s the real issue here.”

“Can you estimate how they make them?”

“Easily.” Neshinbara produced a sign frame displaying a list. “This is only what’s officially reported, but these are the ether tanks the academies use to store external Blessings. The Musashi uses something similar as a fuel tank and you just have to use these. In other words, they compress a massive amount of ether, activate it to an uncontrollable level while compressed, connect it to the ley lines, and let it explode. A new space will push out into the existing space, so a blank space is created in that existing space. Now, the space that was pushed out doesn’t like to be drawn back in, so... Are you listening?”

“Oh, sorry. I’m bad with weapons when it gets too technical.”

“Maa.”

Tsukinowa rubbed its cheek against her to comfort her.

...Oh, you’re so adorable.

“What is that look for, Neshinbara?”

“I may not be one to talk, but I have a feeling there’s going to be some animal material released at the next event.”

“It would be nice if it was something cute, but I doubt it.”

“Yeah...”

After the two of them sighed together, Neshinbara started typing again.

“Well, the ether tank each academy has for their primary religion is enough to make a few dragon line reactors. There have been two so far and I’m a little scared to count how many more they have.”

“But...”

Masazumi tilted her head because she had a small question.

“If they use up their academy’s ether tank, won’t it weaken their nation’s spells? They won’t be able to supply external Blessings for the spells.”

“Tsirhc is the only religion that doesn’t allow internal Blessings because it’s seen as the power of god residing in their body. Mlasi and Shinto both allow them, so they don’t have to rely exclusively on external ones in battle. They

shouldn't have a problem in shorter battles. Also..."

Neshinbara showed her a sign frame.

It displayed the Arabian Peninsula which was also the Kii Peninsula.

"On Nobunaga's orders, P.A. Oda conquered the Mlasi stronghold while also completing the history recreation of burning Mount Hiei. They 'burned' Mount Hiei by setting the temple's ley line reactor to explode. It's possible they stole or secured the Mlasi stronghold's ether tank then."

"I see."

Masazumi nodded and a thought came to her.

...It's not often the secretary and vice president talk like this.

They had been so busy lately that they had not had a chance to exchange information. She had been receiving rushed information directly from the Provisional Council, but it was normally the secretary's job to gather that information together before giving it to her. Once they arrived in Kantou, she hoped their less urgent schedule would allow the Student Council to coordinate better.

"Thanks. I hope you can help me like this again."

She then started to leave, thinking she would stop by the academy.

"Oh, Vice President Honda-kun. May I ask one thing?"

"What is it?"

"Judge," said Neshinbara. "Please give me a calm answer. Did we lose this battle?"

Masazumi looked to Neshinbara.

He had stopped typing, so he was probably going to record this.

"We lost as far as the history recreation is concerned, but I think we actually won."

They had all done their best and Anne had saved them all from unnecessary

damage. If they were to view losing Anne and the entire battle as a loss...

“Do I want to call it a victory because I’m being too emotional?”

“I will record that as your opinion.”

“I see.” Masazumi nodded and pointed toward the academy. “I’ll be waiting on the academy’s bridge. We still have to contact Yoshitsune and the others after all. We’ll also be battling Lord Matsunaga soon, but I’ll leave that one to you.”

“How about you go to Okutama’s underground business district to visit Okutama IZUMO? I believe Spear Honda-kun brought Tonbokiri there.”

After raising a hand and nodding in response, she turned around. She knew a lot was about to happen.

“...”

Suddenly, fog surrounded her.

The Musashi’s gravitational cruising period was over and they had shifted to inertial cruising. By switching between acceleration and coasting, they could reduce their fuel consumption. Their altitude would drop during the inertial cruising periods. This made it easier for the wind around the ship to change which would create cirrus clouds and fog.

It almost looked like a tunnel made of fog. The wave of fog was large enough to envelop all eight ships and it swirled around each individual ship.

...Amazing.

With that thought, Masazumi looked across the sky beyond the fog.

She saw an expanse of moonlit clouds below the Musashi. Looking down on them from above, she could see them pushed by the wind into round shapes. But since the altitude changed the quality of the air, the clouds could not exist above a certain height and they simply formed a bumpy wasteland below.

...I’d read before that they look like a flock of sheep, but it’s true.

Red light shot out again. They had fired another marker.

“We should be above the Seto Inland Sea soon.”

As if to answer her, a dull metallic sound rang from Musashino’s bow. The ship

shook and powerful fog raced around it.

Magdeburg's transport ship was leaving.

It had successfully taken them to the Seto Inland Sea and its long silhouette instantly vanished behind them.

That left only the Musashi in the sky.

"Now we only need to cross the Kii Peninsula to Mikawa."

But then a sudden group of clouds entered Masazumi's vision.

The clouds seemed to distort far off in the west.

"...?"

Masazumi stopped walking and looked west.

The distortion she had seen a moment before had been far off in the distance. It might have been a gust of wind breaking through the clouds from below, but Neshinbara asked a question behind her.

"What is it, Vice President Honda-kun?"

"Well, I thought I saw a distortion from below the clouds a long way over there."

Her comment received two responses. The first was a sudden shout from Neshinbara.

"That's the external influence of primary stealth!"

The other was "Musashino" speaking over a ship-wide divine transmission.

"Attention everyone on the starboard side! ...Oh, now only those in charge need to listen! Anyway, far off to starboard-... We just now determined it is approximately twenty-seven kilometers! ...Anyway, a large primary stealth ship has-... We just now determined it is Ziz-class! All visual confirmation crew are to examine it to-... We just now determined its identity! Over!"

"They're really good at what they do, but I wish they would gather the information before making the announcement."

“That’s because an automaton’s speed is far, far faster than speech.”

Neshinbara’s quiet comment was drowned out by “Musashino’s” conclusion.

“It is the Himeji Castle aka the Shirasagi belonging to M.H.R.R. and Hashiba! We have determined its abilities have changed, so we will be calling it the Shirasagi Mk. II! It is a striking type warship! Therefore...”

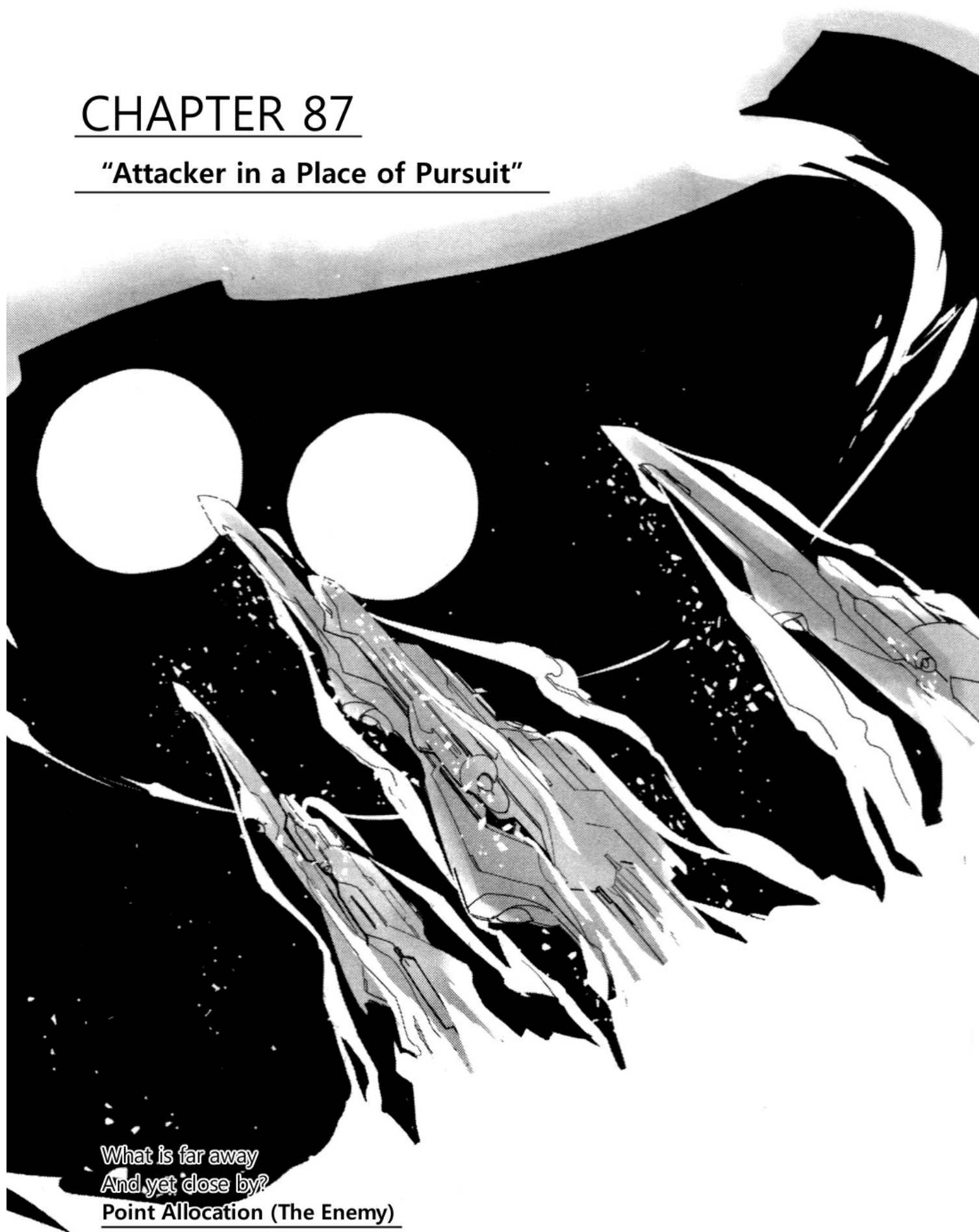
As the announcement continued, light flew toward them from the direction of the previous distortion. The light was red to display its heat.

“It will fire on us while in stealth mode! Over!”

Chapter 87: Attacker in a Place of Pursuit

CHAPTER 87

"Attacker in a Place of Pursuit"



What is far away
And yet close by?

Point Allocation (The Enemy)

What is far away

And yet close by?

Point Allocation (The Enemy)

On Musashino's bridge, Suzu felt several spots of heat in the sky to starboard.

A veritable wall of sound had appeared to the right of the Musashi.

The cannon blasts were approaching from far away.

Something was arriving from the west while the Musashi travelled south-southeast.

"It's...there..."

Suzu sensed the great disturbance of a stealth ship. She had heard it was an M.H.R.R. Hashiba flagship, the Shirasagi Mk. II. It was almost three kilometers long, making it the longest individual enemy ship that had opposed the Musashi.

Suzu recalled what "Musashino" had said.

...It uses the same kind of virtual sea as the Musashi to ascend.

However, it apparently fired wind from its wings to accelerate.

That's different, thought Suzu as she felt a vibration coming from the floor and moved the model of the Shirasagi Mk. II that she had to hold in both hands.

"Musashino" nodded as she watched.

"It is a large striking-type warship, but its speed and mobility are its selling point. It was supposed to be modified for high altitude use after it became Hashiba's, but I have determined that has already been completed. Over."

"I see."

Suzu nodded, but touched the Shirasagi Mk. II she held in her hand.

She had been the one to detect the disturbance caused by the ship, but...

"How did...you know...its name?"

"We determined its identity by measuring the ejection pattern of the

acceleration wind leaving the stealth space. Most ships have the sound they make during flight recorded and that data is exchanged or gathered. And..."

And...

"The data on the Shirasagi arrived from K.P.A. Italia when we arrived in IZUMO. The Pope-Chancellor pressured us into purchasing it with deferred payment. Over."

Oh, thought Suzu. She did not like the Pope-Chancellor very much after the incident in Mikawa, but he may have had his own thoughts about them.

...I guess...I can't hate...him.

She decided to thank him and then nodded.

"What do...we do now?"

As soon as she asked, she felt movement in her hands.

The Shirasagi Mk. II was leaving stealth mode. The form Suzu sensed was much like the estimated model "Musashino" had created. The only difference was that the three movable fuselages were cruising at different heights, making the entire ship look like three stacked horizontal lines, and all of the ship's port cannons were aimed toward the Musashi.

The automaton in charge of divine transmissions spoke from the front of the bridge.

"The Shirasagi Mk. II is requesting a divine transmission link! Should I open it!? Over."

Suzu could tell everyone was looking her way.

...Eh?

Automatons tended to seek instructions from people and she was the only person on the bridge.

"Eh? Eh? U-um, wait... Uh..."

She frantically waved her hands back and forth.

"I-I don't...know."

The Shirasagi Mk. II's bridge was located on the back of the center ship. The bridge was known as the Castle Keep and it was almost empty.

Divine monitors and spell keyboards were being operated in front of the windows to the front and either side, but their users were nowhere to be seen. However, a woman in a ninja version of a P.A. Oda girl's uniform stood in the center with an *insha kotob* displaying their course on the floor.

She was Takigawa Ichimasu. She turned to look at the divine transmission equipment that seemed to be functioning on its own.

"Has the Musashi still not answered us? And after we went out of our way to remove our stealth and try to chat."

An empty chair swiveled toward her. There was no one visible in the seat, but it still held the weight of someone sitting there thanks to ninja stealth techniques. The ninja in charge of divine transmissions spoke without showing himself.

"Shaja. Boss, our Shirasagi is meant for the fight against Mouri, so..."

"Yes, our general mission is to patrol the Osaka Bay area. We can't have the Shirasagi taking damage before the fight against Mouri."

Ichimasu shrugged.

"So we'll only be acting as the command and intelligence ship for the airspace around Osaka Bay. If the Musashi tries to run, we'll do everything we can to follow them halfway across the bay, but Cookie will have to take over after that. We're really only meant to deal with Mouri."

Black and white letters suddenly appeared on the book-shaped divine display board for the divine transmission device.

"Boss! We have a reply from the Musashi! It says 'I don't know'!"

"Eh? What does that mean?"

"Boss! Our information says their current acting captain is a girl named Suzu! And something about filling the bangs slot!?"

A secretly taken photo of a girl appeared in the center of the bridge. It may

have been taken during PE class because she was wearing a track suit. Everyone on the bridge let out a breath when they saw it.

“So this Suzu said ‘I don’t know’?”

“W-was it like this!? Did she tense up her shoulder like this and say ‘I don’t know’!?”

Amid the comments of “maybe so” and “shut up”, Ichimasu tilted her head and glared forward.

“At any rate, this means we can’t speak with them. ...Let’s try attacking even harder. We’re not firing blindly from stealth anymore. Oh, and send them another divine transmission.”

She instructed them what to send.

“We have a divine transmission from the Shirasagi Mk. II! They’re asking ‘are we getting through to you?’ Over!”

“Eh? Eh? Wh-what...does that mean?”

“Suzu-sama, I would guess they are demanding we listen to them. Over.”

“Eh? O-oh, no. Then, um, uh... Send them...this.”

“We have a divine transmission from the Musashi! It says ‘I’m sorry –Suzu’!”

“What? Did I say something wrong?”

The unseen people gathered in the front and center of the bridge for a whispered discussion.

After a while....

“Boss, this may be inappropriate, but I felt a twinge in my heart when I saw the enemy’s divine transmission!”

“Is their captain an airhead?”

They all started whispering again.

“Boss, you didn’t do enough research. That’s Suzu! Suzu!”

“You should at least read the interview she gave at IZUMO.”

“Yeah... If only it was Flat Vassal...”

“You guys need to keep your private lives out of your work.”

Ichimasu appreciated the “Shaja!” she heard, but then someone else spoke up.

“Personally, I’d have an easier time of firing if we were up against some filthy old man. I wouldn’t have to hold back.”

“Yeah, I’d have trouble sleeping if I squished a cute girl.”

“But things can get rough afterwards when you only think of your enemy as an enemy.”

“That’s right,” said someone. “If you squish a cute girl, you wonder why you didn’t stop fighting, but if you squish a filthy old man, you decide it couldn’t be helped. Approving of someone’s death like that can be really rough. ...It dulls you to the value of people’s lives.”

So...

“So...well, we’ll fire, we’ll target you, and we won’t hold back. But...”

But...

“Don’t you die, cutie. That’s your job in all this.”

“In that case.” Ichimasu nodded and raised her right hand. “Fire all weapons! This is now an official battle as we monitor the Musashi inside Osaka Bay!”

“They’re firing! And they’re sending a divine transmission! It says ‘For cruising through M.H.R.R. airspace after the ban, we will capture and stop you’. Over.”

“I see,” said “Musashino”.

“Cruising? But...um, we launched...ourselves...”

“It is not uncommon for our interpretation to differ from theirs. Over.”

After a comment of “oh, dear”, “Musashino” opened a sign frame and set it to address the entire Musashi.

“Everyone, Musashi King Yoshinao-sama may have come up with the idea to

launch ourselves, but this is not his fault. Yes, it is not his fault at all. I am not sure whose fault to say it is, though. Suzu-sama and I worked out the details, but...at any rate, it is not Musashi King Yoshinao-sama's fault. Over."

Musashi King: "No matter what you say, we will not run or hide!!"

Me: "Eh? But that's the most boring reaction you could have."

Asama: "Um, Toori-kun, he did save us with that, you know?"

At any rate, Suzu was not sure what to do. She had a feeling she had made their opponent mad, so...

"L-let's run away?"

"That is an extremely appropriate decision, Suzu-sama. In all of history, not many generals have been able to say that immediately after the battle began. Neshinbara-sama tends in the opposite direction, which, from an automaton's perspective, creates for some ominous possibilities, but...yes, let us run away. Over."

She was thankful "Musashino" agreed, but...

"How?"

It was not "Musashino" who answered that. It was a sign frame that had appeared between the two of them. Neshinbara had apparently sent it and his voice came from it.

"I too agree we should flee given the situation! I really do, okay!?"

"Eh? ...Why?"

"For appearances. Merely for appearances, Suzu-sama. Deep down, he loves charging the enemy, talking for far too long, and glasses. Over."

"Oh...then, there's no...helping it."

"You're making some horrible assumptions about my character, but let's get back on topic. We're up against a high-speed striking-type. Beginning a shoot-out with them would be like taking on a fortress. A giant ship with nothing but gravity barriers and secondary cannons has no chance, so we should hurry on to Mikawa."

Everyone on the bridge started whispering.

“Secretary Neshinbara always treats us so distantly. Over.”

“Judge. We are moving, speaking beings, but he talks about the Musashi like an object. Over.”

“Statistically, that’s the kind of guy who isn’t popular with girls. Over.”

But doesn’t Neshinbara-kun have a girlfriend? wondered Suzu with a tilt of the head. *There’s that person who judges him with extreme objectivity and monitors him extremely closely.*

Regardless...

“What...do we do?”

“Judge. The Shirasagi is an anti-Mouri ship, so it will be important to the recreation of Hashiba’s invasion of Mouri. The Musashi is outside its jurisdiction, so it should not be able to begin an all-out battle with us. If we accelerate and put enough distance between us, it will most likely take on the role of Osaka Bay’s command and intelligence ship by supporting another ship in the bay.”

Huh? thought Suzu. That was not quite what she had asked, so she tilted her head and asked again.

“What...do we do?”

“Eh?” replied Neshinbara.

Everyone began whispering again.

“See? Suzu-sama was asking for a realistic means of piloting or an actual course to take, but his explanation went on too long. Over.”

“This is the problem with nerds. Over.”

“Suzu-sama is... Suzu-sama is angry now! Over.”

“Eh? I-I’m not...mad. Just...troubled.”

Almost Everyone: “He troubled Suzu-san!!”

“Wait! The rest of you have been making a lot of noise, but you misunderstand!” said Neshinbara. “They may be a high-speed ship, but our top

speed is higher. Our primary objective is reaching Edo through Mikawa, so if we accelerate away from the Shirasagi Mk. II, we can force them back to their original patrol duties. ...‘Musashino’-kun, if we continue our acceleration from here on out-...”

“There is no need to speculate. Our fuel will not last until Kantou. We must use inertial cruising. Over.”

“Then let’s accelerate while using inertial cruising. ‘Musashino’-kun, you know how, don’t you?”

“There’s...a way to do...that?”

“Judge. There is, Suzu-sama. It is something we can only do in our current situation. Over.”

“Musashino” looked toward the bow and opened her mouth.

“All ships, begin descent. Angle down by fifteen degrees. ...We will use the momentum of our descent to accelerate while remaining in inertial cruising. After the descent, begin acceleration and lose the Shirasagi Mk. II. Over.”

As the Musashi slowly began to tilt down, “Musashino” said more.

“Neshinbara-sama, please prepare yourself. Currently, the Musashi is traveling along the provisional borders between nations and principalities while using markers. Even during a battle, we can only move along those borders. In other words...”

“Musashino” nodded before continuing.

“If we do not fire a course marker at an estimated four locations before reaching Matsunaga’s territory, we will have given the enemy a justification to attack. Over.”

“Boss! The Musashi is descending!!”

Ichimasu whistled at the report from the unseen divine transmission operator. To their port side, the moonlit Musashi was kicking up the clouds in its descent.

It was moving quickly. The bow pierced the clouds almost immediately, the

clouds reached the waterline, and then the streets, gantry cranes, and derricks on the top slid below as well.

“Boss! What should we do!? The Musashi has the higher top speed, so we’ll lose them at this rate!”

“Maintain our altitude,” replied Ichimasu. “Instead of moving up or down, stay behind them and pursue them at full speed.”

“We’re not going to attack!? But we just finished showing off how manly we are!”

“I’m a woman, so that has nothing to do with me. Besides, the Shirasagi is meant for Mouri, so we only have permission to patrol around Osaka Bay. Plus, they can only move along the provisional borders. We have our own defense network, so our only role is to monitor and pursue them. We’ll stay on the Musashi’s tail until almost to the Kii Peninsula. We’ll follow at full speed.”

Ichimasu punched her palm, looked to the course on the *insha kotob* at her feet, and crossed her arms.

“I don’t know what Old Man Matsunaga wants, but it looks like he’s getting it. But things are getting busy here. Akechi controls the area north of the provisional border the Musashi has to follow through the Kii Peninsula, but he’s been strengthening Kyoto’s defenses since Hashiba ended their shift toward Magdeburg. That means only the light ships up front can make an appearance now.”

That’s right.

“Well, there is one person who can summon a fleet by cheating, so is he arriving on a high-speed ship down below?”

The navigation officer answered in the affirmative.

“Shaja. They’re following from behind. Also, even though the M.H.R.R. Catholic fleet was focused on Magdeburg and K.P.A. Italia, they still set up a defense network on the ocean and more ships are arriving as we speak. And a major ship will be coming from P.A. Oda on Lady Hashiba’s request. If we can slow down the Musashi somewhere, they should be able to sink it with ease.”

“So there’s more than enough pursuit, is there? That means we have to figure out how to reduce the Musashi’s speed with the defense network.”

Ichimasu looked to the Kii Peninsula on the map.

“The biggest problem is Old Man Matsunaga at the Kii Peninsula. Will he block the Musashi’s way or take their side? What do you think?”

“Well...”

They all sounded uncertain, but then the course confirmation officer’s voice cut sharply across the bridge.

“The Musashi has passed the course marker on the south while maintaining their south-southeast course! They have entered the Seto Inland Sea and are headed for the Kii Peninsula! I believe they have chosen the shortest route toward the center of the Kii Peninsula, north of Matsunaga’s territory!”

“At how many more points will the Musashi have to fire a marker?”

“Three!”

Three red dots appeared on the map of Osaka Bay. The Musashi was currently crossing the bay from the north to the southeast.

According to the navigator...

“The first point is directly along their course, the second is along a gentle southward turn to leave the Sakai region and arrive alongside the Kii Peninsula. And the third...the third will be difficult because it requires a sharp eastward turn into the Kii Peninsula!”

The Musashi rumbled as it descended southward.

It applied the same buffering control as when it used gravitational cruising, but it still had some effect on the air. It produced the same rumbling as thunder clouds as it sank below the clouds toward the dark inland sea.

Below them, the great expanse of the sea was filled with darkness.

The cloudy sky meant the water’s surface was entirely dark.

Still, the Musashi continued on.

The slight brightness in the sky made the horizon vaguely visible, so they pointed south and accelerated horizontally.

They shot forward.

They pushed on the air, creating a powerful rumbling between the sky and sea. Mist formed on the sea below, blurring the darkness visible there.

And just as the Musashi accelerated toward the south, red light dropped to the sea from their bow.

They had fired a course marker.

It fell to the buoy-mounted marker set up on the water and the Musashi corrected its course somewhat. It turned port, toward the Kii Peninsula south-southeast of them.

Of the three markers they had to pass on the way to the peninsula, they had passed the first and were on their way to the second.

Currently, they could see dark shadows beyond the eastern sea on their port side.

They looked like scratch marks between the sea and the sky, but they were actually islands stretching from Osaka to the southern end of the Kii Peninsula.

However, countless people existed in the small lights on those islands.

Those lights belonged to Osaka and the Sakai region.

The Musashi traveled south-southeast with the lights on their port side. They were on their way to the Kii Peninsula that had relatively few village lights.

After descending and floating back up a little, the eight giant ships fixed themselves in a perfectly horizontal layout.

But the Musashi did not slow down. A pursuing enemy distorted the clouds in the sky behind them.

That enemy was the Shirasagi Mk. II.

It was a good distance away, but it whipped up the clouds as if to show off its presence.

A red light stretched into the sky from the sea ahead and to the port side.

The second point had given a sign to confirm its location.

This second marker point was positioned alongside the Kii Peninsula and required a southward curve from the Musashi's south-southwestern course.

The wind on the sea grew stronger and the chilled air surrounded the Musashi with mist. It kicked up the white mist as if sliding along some waves on its way to the marker point.

Its course took a turn to the right.

Light filled the inside of the Musashi's expanded outer hull. It was beginning to accelerate via gravitational cruising.

It had to turn starboard, which was to the south, so the port side acceleration kicked in slightly earlier.

The wind roared and the Musashi slid sideways as it turned southward.

The second marker point fired another red light when it detected the Musashi's approach, so the Musashi corrected its bow to the south to sweep away the mist.

Asakusa, Shinagawa, and Musashino's bows faced the marker point and the entire Musashi accelerated.

They hurried. They would have to slow down for the tricky third point, so this was their only chance to lose their enemy.

And so they sped up.

Their gouging trajectory twisted the Musashi from south-southwest to south.

They continued on.

They could not fully restrain the shaking of the air, so that shaking slammed into the ocean approximately 1.5 thousand meters below. The water bounced back up and mist rose in a wide range on either side of them.

They passed the second point.

They were slightly off course, but the marker ejector angled diagonally to correct.

They fired and the marker point fired back its own light to confirm receipt of

the signal.

They passed through.

The Musashi then shifted to inertial cruising. They maintained as much of their accelerated momentum as possible, but they had already started angling eastward to safely pass through the third marker point.

However, some mist suddenly appeared in front of them. It was neither a natural occurrence nor created by the Musashi.

This was another fleet.

Catholic warships bearing the school emblem of M.H.R.R. had arrived ahead of them.

After the battle with K.P.A. Italia, this fleet had predicted the Musashi's route and situated themselves here instead of heading to the Magdeburg region. Musashi had run into one point on their defense network.

However, the Musashi did not slow down.

They continued their advance.

The enemy had removed their primary stealth to make a sudden appearance, so the eighteen ships were all wrapped in white mist that trailed through the night sky.

As if to prove their hostile intent, the mist was blown away and light was sent toward the Musashi.

They had fired.

The cannon fire sounded like distant thunder and it carried far to the east.

With the sea to the south, a mountain range overlooked a great plain from the northwest. Yoshitsune sat among the campfires munching on a Shingen Mochi, but she looked up toward the low rumbling from the west.

“Have the heavy mechanical cavalry prepare for battle. Send out all Eight Banners.”

The Satou Brothers had been preparing tea and peeling pears that were not

quite ripe yet, but they raised their eyebrows at that.

However, they sent her instructions via sign frame without asking a thing.

A few moments later, several lines of light began moving quickly from east to west along the plain.

Those lights came from the mechanical cavalry.

With the elites of the Eight Banners, there were twenty seven thousand of them.

The students in the lead wore horo with anti-air defense spells written on them and they rode large, two-wheeled mechanical horses. The mechanical horses were all equipped with cowlings. They switched from the quadrupedal gait of their standby mode and entered the fixed-leg position of their mobility mode. Wind ether surrounded their legs and filled the night with bluish white light.

Wheels were attached to their legs in place of horseshoes, but due to the position of the four legs, the ether light of the two wheels in the front or back overlapped and formed a single wheel of light in the front and back.

While they were technically driving, the two glowing wheels floated a few centimeters off the ground.

They shined their lights forward as they moved west.

They were followed by the heavy mechanical horses.

These were over one hundred meters tall. They looked like bigger versions of the smaller mechanical horses except with four or eight wheels, but anti-air cannons larger than they were tall were equipped on their backs and sides. These heavily-equipped models had a few spell piles on the sides of their legs to hold themselves in place while firing.

Each of the mechanical horses leading each unit and all twenty four of the heavy mechanical horses had a flag raised on their backs. The eight colors of those flags divided them into eight battalions which formed up to view the western sky.

The Satou Brothers brought a single mechanical horse over to Yoshitsune. It was a large white touring type. The ether tank bore the emblem of Qing-Takeda

and a shrine maiden Mouse stood on it.

The Mouse did a little dance and beckoned her over, so Yoshitsune smiled and nodded.

“I’ll be counting on you again, Shizuka.”

“I’ll be with you wherever you go.”

“I suppose so.”

Yoshitsune stood up and climbed aboard Shizuka. She wiped the dark syrup from her mouth with a finger and licked the finger clean.

“If we sold these in the Edo region, we could do some good business.”

“If we can win over Musashi, we might be able to open a trade route.”

“That’s true.”

She nodded and faced forward to look at the western sky beyond the rows of fires.

“Listen, everyone.”

She thought about what to say before continuing.

“It looks like the Musashi is on its way, but Hashiba, Oda, or M.H.R.R. are going to be right on their tail. We need to recreate Mikatagahara, so they’re in the way. I’m sure the Satou Brothers will show their tolerant spirits by telling M.H.R.R. ‘get lost, you fools’, but... Are you going to tell them that, Satou? You are, aren’t you? Make sure you do. And in those exact words. Hm? The older one is going to do it? ...Quit trying to force that onto each other, you fools.”

She took a breath.

“Anyway, we need to get them away from the Musashi, but we can’t fire any warning shots. I really do like firing cannons. I love it. I always want to fire some to celebrate during festivals. Horizontally, of course. ...Now, what was I talking about again, Satou Brothers? C’mon, no need to be so polite. ...What! Is that any way to address me!?

“Well, anyway, there’s a chance we’ll have to use our scouts, so everyone prepare for battle. If any idiots show up, shoot them. ...No, wait. Only shoot the

sort-of idiots. There's a spectacular idiot on the Musashi, but shooting him wouldn't do anything to fix him."

Yoshitsune rubbed the back of her head from above and sighed.

She heard another sound much like distant thunder. It was deeper and she could make out the individual sounds now.

The Musashi was under attack.

Yoshitsune smiled with her eyebrows raised.

"Once the Musashi shows up, make sure to celebrate by firing your cannons. But not horizontally, okay? And feel free to hit the Musashi too as long as it's small enough we can pass it off as a joke."

A windowless room of not quite ten square meters contained a bunk bed and two desks by the wall.

A girl in a wheelchair sat in front of the desk in the back. She gave the door a sharp look where a girl in glasses stood with a notebook held to her chest.

"Judge. Well, I think I'll be going now."

"That's fine, Adele Balfette. I understand the situation now. Yes."

She smiled bitterly.

"Staying here wouldn't help anything, so you should probably get back. You're busy, aren't you?"

Despite that, Adele looked around the room curiously.

"They say people change, but it looks like they really do. Azuma-san's tastes sure have."

"That's my bed actually."

"Mama's bed!"

Adele smiled at the translucent girl who stood up with the lower bunk's blanket still over her head.

"Ah ha ha. Mama? So do the two of you have a common-law marria-ah!"

The floor suddenly shook as if being rocked by waves. The wheelchair's wheels automatically moved to recline the device and balance itself.

Adele however almost tripped and frantically grabbed at the sliding door.

"Ah."

The door slid open, pulling her for about three steps. Then she saw who stood on the other side.

"Papa!"

It was Azuma.

To prepare for battle mobility, the Musashi had to supply the rooms with air and hold the contents of the rooms in place using spells. Azuma had visited a police box to pick up the "high mobility house safety set" distributed for that purpose.

...Oh, she's here to report on what happened today.

Miriam completed her schooling in this room using the notes taken by their classmates, the textbooks, and the lessons prepared by the teachers. One of the girls in the class would take notes each day and drop them off. During busy days like this one, they would also explain what had happened.

They apparently chatted a lot like girls tended to do and also complained about their everyday life or their work.

According to Miriam...

"Almost all girls talk about the same kinds of things together."

Azuma had to wonder if that was how it worked, but at the moment, Adele bowed toward him.

"I'll be going."

"Huh? You're leaving already?"

"Ah ha ha. I'd only be in the way. ...So you're the mama and papa? You've got a pretty mature setup here."

“Adele-kun, are you sure the rest of the class hasn’t been influencing you a lot lately?”

With that, Azuma opened the home shrine above the door and replaced the old Shinto charm with the new one he had gotten. The home shrine was well-made, but it was different from those in other rooms.

“This one is bigger than the others.”

“That’s because this is Miriam’s room,” replied Adele.

“Really?”

Inside the room, Miriam looked up a bit and nodded. She placed a hand on her wheelchair and chest before shrugging.

“It can be difficult for a girl to live all on her own. Of course, there are some different difficulties now.”

Adele nodded too.

“Just think of it as a way of making sure she can get by without too much trouble.”

I see, he thought while also thinking that was implicitly referencing her legs.

...But if I apologized, she’d definitely say I hadn’t expected that answer when I asked and she would say apologizing here meant she would always be someone who needs to be apologized to.

He finished preparing the home shrine without saying anything more.

Adele was about to leave with the notebook in her arms, but...

“Do you not have to fight this time?”

“My mobile shell is more or less fixed, but the secretary said this will be a naval battle.”

So...

“It’s probably going to get a little rough.”

The Musashi flew over the nighttime sea while under fire.

It had plenty of speed and its destination was clear, but that meant the enemy knew exactly where to position themselves and the small fleet could persistently attack.

During inertial cruising, they had no trouble creating gravity barriers, but that weakened their buffering against the air and their speed dropped more quickly. The enemy's eighteen high speed ships were already ahead of or alongside the Musashi, so they could constantly fire on any point.

"I have determined it would be dangerous not to apply a burst of gravitational acceleration! Over!"

"Musashino" shouted within Musashino's bridge and "Musashi" replied via their shared memory. "Musashi" was already tending to her ether flower garden on the bridge in front of the academy.

"That will make it more difficult to pass through the next point, so put together a countermeasure. If you have one, then I will allow it. Over."

All of the automatons replied "judge" over their shared memory.

But inside the bridge, Suzu gasped at the movement she sensed inside the enemy fleet.

"R-rows!"

The eight enemy ships up ahead formed an upper and lower row of four ships.

This was a wall.

Their way forward was blocked and at the same time...

"The five ships on either side are firing! Over!!"

The impacts on the left and right shook the Musashi.

The P.A. Oda forces had caught the Musashi right in front of the Kii Peninsula.

The P.A. Oda high speed ships began firing on the Musashi.

The way forward was completely blocked and constant cannon fire struck them from either side. That arrangement had been decided by the demon on the stern of the third ship in the group up ahead.

He was Kuki who had lost his right arm.

To keep his balance, a large shield from M.H.R.R.'s Holy Knights' Steel Association hung from the hard point part on his right side. He spread his empty left hand forward.

"Continue firing! And if the Musashi tries to accelerate their way through, ram them with the leading ships! We need to stop them over the sea even if it means sacrificing our own lives!"

Kuki looked to the giant ship that seemed to be pursuing them.

...Such an enormous presence.

But, he thought. He had done something similar to his own opponent today. Murakami Motoyoshi, leader of the Murakami Navy, had opposed his galleys with a fleet of smaller ships. The size difference between those smaller ships and the galleys would have been similar to this. Also...

"Our tactics here are similar to the ones he used against us."

Now, what will they do? he wondered.

He had come here despite his injuries out of pure curiosity as a tactician.

...Talk about being selfish!

He was glad he belonged to P.A. Oda. Hashiba was an understanding person. She had said "If you are curious, then I guess there's no stopping you." while averting her gaze for some reason, but he considered it a win because he had been allowed to come.

But here on the battlefield, nothing was greater than his curiosity in his enemies and allies.

The Musashi was an unusually large ship, so what would it do on the battlefield and what would its enemies force it to do?

...You don't often get a chance to see and experience something like this!

An *insha kotob* appeared next to him. It displayed the ninja woman named Takigawa Ichimasu.

"What should I do, Cookie? They've pulled away from me, so can I leave this to

you?”

“This is the site of my curiosity. And if you did anything unnecessary, Hashiba would be disappointed.”

“It’s really not fair that you don’t just say she wouldn’t be happy.”

“Sorry, but I speak from a man’s perspective. Anyway, the information you gathered on the way here was useful. The information processing of a large ship really is on another level. Also, let me ask your opinion. What do you think they’ll do?”

“They’ll head down, won’t they? It takes a lot of power to move something that big up. That’s why you chose to go down during the evening, right? I saw the records of that.”

“Shaja,” replied Kuki, but the right side of Ichimasu’s mouth rose.

“Well, in the worst case, they’ll come straight at you. That might be what I would do.”

“That would be the worst case. Do they think they can reach Kantou if we destroy their armor?”

“They might think so, they might think you’ll move out of the way, or...” said Ichimasu. “Whatever the case, nothing’s scarier than an enemy without any sense.”

“That’s true,” agreed Kuki.

At that moment, a lookout spoke up.

“The Musashi is beginning to move! Its bow is lowering! They’re descending to speed up and slip below us!!”

Kuki’s decision was swift and so were the movements of his men.

Having already experienced a similar battle, they knew what would happen and how it would turn out. So...

“Descend! If it comes to it, crush the Musashi from above!”

They began descending quickly enough for their feet to float off the deck.

Ahead, the Musashi was lowering its head toward them, revealing its upper surface.

But, thought Kuki.

...We will win this!

The Musashi was large. With its great height, it would have to descend quite a bit to slip below Kuki's ships. With its upper surface exposed like this, they only had to descend and collide with that upper surface.

...Will they try to deflect us with gravity barriers? Or snag us with the derricks?

"What are you going to do!?"

As soon as he asked, the Musashi displayed a sudden color.

It was the white of mist and spraying water.

As the Musashi descended, it created its buoyancy ocean in front of its bow.

Just as Kuki wondered why, the thought leading to the answer came to him. With the solution in mind, he gave a shout.

"So that's what you're doing!!"

The Musashi applied powerful brakes to its bow.

Its descent had provided acceleration, but the instant it took on that additional speed, it created a thick buoyancy ocean only in front of its bow.

The descending front end collided with the ocean that tried to lift it.

This was a powerful braking method.

The ocean stopped the ship and also lifted the creaking stern.

But then they began the acceleration of gravitational cruising.

The Musashi had pitched forward, so the acceleration from the rear caused the stern to quickly swing upwards.

But they did something else just as leverage lifted the stern.

"Release the virtual ocean!! Over!"

On “Musahino’s” command, the ocean lifting the bow vanished along with the ether light.

With nothing restricting the bow anymore, the Musashi gained a certain motion.

It pitched forward in midair and skidded forward and upwards.

It hopped.

“Ensure internal anti-shock buffering! Over!!”

The bow was thrown forward and upwards and the stern flew after it.

The Musashi made a short jump with its rear lifted high like a pouncing beast.

The wind roared and the eight ships leaped through the night sky in unison.

Like a knife being pushed forward, they made a powerful jump with great initial speed.

The bow pointed down towards Kuki’s descending fleet, but they jumped over those ships.

Then, the eight ships resumed gravitational cruising, starting from those in the back.

After jumping over the enemy ships, the Musashi quickly picked up speed while making a shallow descent.

By the time Kuki and his men looked back through the whipping wind, the Musashi was already just above the sea’s surface in the distance. And it was splitting the sea below it.

“Well done!!”

On Musashino’s bridge, “Musashino” nodded at the sign frame from Mitotsudaira.

When they had been surrounded by the enemy fleet and under fire, a divine transmission had arrived from Mitotsudaira.

“Can we jump over them?”

She had had difficulty explaining it verbally, so she had bent one of Asama's arrows and sent it flying into the distance as a real-time demonstration.

In the footage of that one-shot demonstration, the spinning arrow had hit Ohiroshiki who was wandering the deck yelling "Any little girls! Any lost little girls around here!?" Regardless, it had been enough to explain the principle and they had immediately done it for real.

However...

"I have determined that went quite well. Over."

They had all used a lot of their processing power to pull that off with no practice.

Under those conditions, they had to perform the calculations several times over to avoid failure and they had to perform a wider range of calculations because a lot of the directions were not yet clear. That had put a large burden on them, but Mitotsudaira had praised them and...

"Amaz...ing!"

Suzu also looked back at them, so it had all been more than worth it. Most wonderful of all, everyone was safe and they had accomplished the necessary acceleration.

They simply had to continue on toward the Kii Peninsula.

However, the automaton detecting ether readings suddenly straightened up and turned around.

"A new ether reading is pursuing us approximately three kilometers to port! Over."

"Pursuing us? Over."

"Musashino" could not imagine what kind of ship could be pursuing the Musashi after they accelerated to lose Kuki's high-speed fleet.

In that case, she thought while giving instructions.

"Determine the identity of our pursuer. Over!"

"Judge!"

That response was immediately followed by the answer.

“These are ghosts! Ghost ships made of ether have manifested! This reading...”

They all realized the same thing.

“This is Maeda Toshiie’s Israfil! These are Landsknecht aerial warships! Over!”

The ships made waves in the empty air as they slid along.

There were a total of five ghost ships made entirely of ether. They moved quickly and smoothly toward the Musashi without making a sound or shaking in the slightest.

They were old ocean ships.

These ships from the Age of Discovery amplified the wind hitting the sails to power their flight and they had no bow. They were less than one hundred meters long and looked a lot like modern transport ships.

However, the sails made of ether light were torn and catching no wind.

The crew wore torn sailor’s outfits and were all made of bones.

As the wind washed over them, they would occasionally move to stare directly at the Musashi.

The central command ship contained Maeda Toshiie in his red M.H.R.R. uniform. Matsu stood on his right shoulder with her wings of light expanded.

“Thanks, Ma-chan. I’m glad I held back in Magdeburg. It took a lot of work to call in this group that died in the Pacific.”

The ghosts may have retained some slight memories of their lives. First, the bicorne-wearing captain came to greet them and the others came in order of rank. The crew of the other ships approached the side of their ship, some bowing, some raising their swords, and some removing their hats.

“Thank you.”

Were they being so polite because he had made a contract with them using money and also used a European ghost spell that included a vow to god? Or were they showing their courtesy for their employer who was a ghost just like

them? He did not know.

...But I'm quite the opportunist for thinking of them as alive and myself as a ghost.

Toshiie faced forward.

The mist trailed behind and tore away from the Musashi as the ship traveled alongside the Kii Peninsula.

"Aren't they moving too fast to make the turn onto the peninsula's provisional border?"

The ghost ships were closer to the peninsula and thus had the inner corner, so Toshiie gave his instructions.

"Do not fire. Focus on speed so we can hold the inner corner at the third marker point. The turn into the peninsula is a ninety degree angle from south to east. If we hold that inner corner, they can't fire the marker at the point. That gives us the material we need to accuse them later."

The Shirasagi Mk. II slowed down in the sky. It was already near the Kii Peninsula, which was the edge of its jurisdiction as Himeji Castle in the history recreation of the attack on Mouri.

But as Ichimasu managed the courses of the ships participating in the battle, she expressed her astonishment with the direct-line path of Toshiie's accelerating ship.

"Not bad." She whistled. "That's some amazing acceleration, Toshi. Or is it just that ghost ships are fast? Then you're useless, Toshi."

"B-boss! This is progressing too quickly!"

"Don't worry about it." She checked Toshiie's course. "That speed is cheating. That would be how they caught up after the switchover on the coast."

The Musashi had left Osaka Bay on the east and taken a gentle curve toward the Kii Peninsula, but Toshiie had made a straight shot across the coast from the west side of Osaka Bay. It was a slight difference, but the fact remained that Toshiie's straight line would arrive first.

But...

“Boss, the Musashi’s gravitational cruising is quite fast, so how can Master Toshiie’s ghost ships keep up like that?”

Ichimasu spread her mouth side to side at the navigator’s question. She was not sure how to answer.

“Shaja. Well, I called it cheating, but it really is. Any European sailor has probably heard the legend of Der Fliegende Holländer that has to eternally wander the seas after cursing god and dying at the Cape of Good Hope.”

She laughed and saw on the map that Toshiie’s five ships had finally caught up to the Musashi.

“That ship wanders in the distance, but when it approaches, it smoothly follows you and you can never get away. Ghost ships are often described like that, but that’s because they appear by resonating with the other ship’s ‘existence as a ship’ through the ley lines. They appear because they’re called. That means a ghost ship’s speed is dependent on the other ship. They’re pulled by the ship that called them, so they will always follow it. It’s sort of like a kind of shadow. That’s the basics of it anyway.”

Ichimasu stepped on the white intersection between the Musashi and Toshiie’s ghost ships on the map displayed on the floor. Then she smiled.

“No matter how fast the Musashi moves, it can never lose them.”

The unseen crew audibly gulped, but Ichimasu shrugged and spoke. *Toshi has a pretty unique fighting force*, she thought.

“Of course, that means the ghost ships would be small fries if they’re called by a slow little ship. But for a high-speed ship like the Musashi, a ship that can always catch up to them is deadly. Then again, the ghost ships have old equipment and probably won’t be able to get a decisive blow in. We need either the Shirasagi or...”

Ichimasu kicked the map at her feet with her heel.

Halfway across Osaka Bay, the number of lights indicating their forces had exceeded one hundred.

“That’s Cookie for you. Even after they got past him, he’s gathering all of the defense network’s ships to pursue the Musashi.”

As she spoke, Toshiie’s five ships and the Musashi approached the turn into the Kii Peninsula and their courses began to mix together on the map.

They were fighting for the proper position to make that turn.

“They have to make a ninety degree eastern turn to make the provisional border across the Kii Peninsula. The marker point is on the inner corner, so an out-in-out route would get them through without slowing down as much.”

But...

“Toshi has the inner corner, so it isn’t going to be easy for the Musashi.”

Based on the courses visible on the map, both sides were maintaining their speed and pushing for the inner corner.

However, Ichimasu smiled bitterly when she saw Toshiie’s course.

...You really are bad at this, Toshi. You haven’t used ships much, have you?

He was here despite that because he was intent on winning and because he was relying on Kuki’s fleet catching up.

So...

“We need to live up to Toshi’s expectations since he’s really pushing himself here. ...It makes me want to show off what I can do.”

She said “listen” as if speaking to herself.

“The word Holländer can refer both to a ghost ship and to a Dutchman. If it was a Protestant Dutchman that cursed god and died after being shipwrecked, then you might be able to invite him to Catholicism so he can redo things. Toshi, I’m impressed you visited the Cape of Good Hope...which I suppose that would be Kyushu. Kyushu is where Naru will eventually rebel and where you have to defeat him, so did you get permission from the Testament Union by saying you were preparing for that? ...You really can be masochistic like that, Toshi.”

So...

“Keep up the hard work. A chance is sure to present itself.”

The five ghost ships and the eight ships of the Musashi continued fighting over their position in the sky.

As the Musashi continued south, its destination was the center point of the Kii Peninsula's western coast on the left up ahead. Turning left there would take them east along the peninsula's provisional border.

The peninsula had already grown large on their port side. The red light fired by the third marker point rose toward the heavens in the center of the dark shadow's western edge.

Toshiie's five ghost ships were small, but they were pushing southwest, to knock the Musashi out of the turn.

The Musashi was at least seventy times as long as Toshiie's ghost ship, but he showed no fear. He was trying to push the Musashi away by ramming it.

"Go, everyone! Start by keeping the Musashi from checking in with the marker point on the peninsula's entrance! We need to accomplish at least that much!"

"Toshi, won't that be due to our interference and not due to the Musashi's mistake?"

Ichimasu sent a divine transmission and Toshiie nodded.

"Shaja. Listen, Ichimasu. The Musashi will leave its course both because of our interference and because it's moving so quickly. Watch."

As he spoke, the ghost ships collided with the Musashi.

They primarily pushed at it on the bow and stern of Asakusa, the first port ship. Each time Asakusa tried to take the proper path for the turn, the ghost ships would push it away from that inner corner.

"Do you understand?"

The Musashi was moving very quickly. The impacts from outside were greatly affecting its movements.

The ghost ships were far smaller, but the Musashi could not help but shake.

Fearing that interference, the Musashi took a wider turn, to the detriment of

its overall movement.

“My interference is only affecting it so much because it is moving so fast. If it were not moving this fast, I doubt ghost ships this small could push it off course. ...To put it another way, the Musashi could maintain its course despite my interference as long as it cruised like normal.”

Which meant...

“The Musashi will have left its course for its own safety and it will fly into another nation’s airspace fast enough to call it an invasion. ...That’s how this will turn out.”

“You sure do love sophistry, Toshi.”

“I do.” He smiled bitterly. “But if the Musashi is allowed to leave its course for its own convenience, then the other nations will be forced to let it fly through their airspace any time Musashi can claim they have a reason for it. ...Even if that reason is entirely false. Any nation at war or with an enemy will never allow that. There would always be a threat of the Musashi cooperating with their enemy, invading in the name of ‘leaving their course’, and letting down troops from that enemy.”

Toshiie looked to the Musashi.

“Here it comes. The Musashi is taking me seriously now.”

After that, light flew from the side of the Musashi’s deck.

“It’s firing!!”

The Musashi repeatedly fired on the ghost ships.

The ghost ships used their small size and great speed to evade.

A shell would occasionally graze them or hit them, but...

“You can’t sink us that easily!!”

Toshiie did not hesitate to drop some money as he raised his eyebrows and the corners of his mouth.

When the silver coin landed, the dead rose and used their own bodies as parts

to repair the ship.

The cannon fire was affecting them, but the money could buy some time before the ghost ships were fully destroyed.

But from Tama's deck, Neshinbara ordered the Musashi to continue firing.

"Always focus your fire on the closest ship! Make sure to damage that one ship!"

They could not sink the ghost ships easily, but by always damaging one of the five, they could force the ghost ships to attack in a rotation. They set up the rotation in groups of two, so the other ship could swap out for the damaged one.

However, that gave the attacks a tempo.

"Toshi! They can tell what you're going to do! Throw some more randomness into your movements!"

"Sorry! I'm a little overwhelmed right now! I'm sure I'd wonder what that idiot commander is doing if I was watching this from afar, but it sure is hard to focus in the middle of it all!"

"If you get it, then show some respect to your upperclassman and do as I say!!"

But just as the ghost ships began a new rotation, the Musashi responded in a new way as well.

Each ship moved separately to give the port ships vertical movement.

"They're evading at this speed!?"

It would be harder for them to make the turn now, but the automatons' calculations could correct for it if they incorporated the vertical movement into their course.

The ghost ships had difficulty targeting the giant ships as they moved up or down.

On Musashino's bridge, Suzu added the air currents up ahead into the model, "Musashino" sent that data to all eight ships, and they all calculated out their

countless course patterns.

On the ghost fleet's flagship, Toshiie gave instructions to the ships trying to ram the Musashi as it moved up and down.

"It's impossible to push on the outer hull when they're moving like that! But this reveals something else to us!"

His eyes were focused on the Musashi's outer hull as wind wrapped around it. He was looking inside the opened accelerators and the idling light inside.

"Let's rob the Musashi of its legs!"

The first to notice the enemy ship's movement was Noriki as he carried an armor panel on Asakusa's outer shell.

The enemy was coming. They all knew that, so he did not need to say it.

The enemy was approaching. They all knew that as well, so he did not need to say it.

But the enemy's movement was weird. They were no longer trying to ram the hull.

...They're trying to slip below our port side.

He did not know what that meant, so he said it.

Laborer: "The enemy on the port side is weird."

Almost Everyone: "Weird!?"

Come to think of it, people sometimes say I'm a bad speaker, he remembered just as shattering light burst from the front port side and the entire ship shook violently.

The ghost ship had rammed full speed into the accelerator to destroy it at the cost of its own destruction.

"The enemy has rammed the opened hull on Asakusa's port side! The enemy ship has been destroyed and has vanished!! Asakusa's gravitational cruising

accelerators #11 to #13 have been damaged! We have lost a maximum of 12% from Asakusa's port side acceleration! Over!"

Hearing the report from the ship-to-ship communication automaton, "Musashino" used her shared memory to quickly speak with "Asakusa".

Musashino: "How are you feeling? Over."

Asakusa: "Judge. Having learned my lesson in England, I purged the affected area just before the enemy hit. I have determined the damage will have minimal effect on the outer shell and internal components. I am working with the kobolds to rearrange the internal ether pathways in the damaged area. By adding in blocking parts, I can reduce the loss to 5% within two minutes. Over."

Musashino: "That is the result of an excellent learning experience. Please share those memories with the rest of us afterwards. Over."

After an instant to go over things, "Musashino" gave her decision to the rest of the ships.

"As our speed will drop from now on and because we could take more damage, I would like to build up some more speed here, but..."

As soon as she said that, an automaton spoke up after detecting an ether reading.

"Another enemy ship is approaching! It is trying to ram Oume's port side! Over."

"Musashino" frowned.

...The enemy must have a reason to go as far as destroying themselves to wear us down.

"Are they sacrificing themselves for the fleet arriving from behind!? Over."

"We wouldn't sacrifice ourselves for no reason. Someone needs to capture you. But...I will sacrifice the piece that will have the greatest effect."

Toshiie looked to the Musashi through the wind.

Ether light smoke was rising from Asakusa's port side.

An excellent result, he thought.

“We have an expert in naval battles, so I only need to set the stage. That’s why I’m the treasurer.”

He sent one of his ships into Oume’s port side from below. This collision would rob the port side of all its speed. Even if the Musashi took emergency measures, this would be enough when combined with the damage to Asakusa.

The ship slipped into the gap in the Musashi’s giant outer shell.

The ghosts on the ship looked back toward him and crossed themselves, so he nodded back.

“Thank you. May you rest in Catholic peace.”

Meanwhile, the ghost ship continued its charge.

“!?”

It was destroyed.

Light exploded before Toshiie’s eyes. It was the expected light of the ghost ship’s destruction, but...

“What just happened!?”

The Musashi was unharmed.

What just happened? he asked silently this time. *Their cannons couldn’t have hit it at such close range and while they’re moving up and down.*

Also, the ghosts had been acting oddly at the moment of destruction. For some reason...

...They were raising their arms!?

Just as he questioned what could have made them so happy as they were destroyed, the light of the destroyed ghost ship and crew rose into the heavens and vanished. That meant powerful purification had sublimated the ether instead of destroying it. And...

“Gunner,” said Matsu while looking upwards.

Toshiie saw the enemy on Oume's starboard deck.

It was a shrine maiden. Her black hair fluttered in the powerful wind, her binder skirt held her in her firing position, and she held a giant bow.

"I-I completely forgot! All ships, keep your distance and fly in an evasive pattern!"

Toshiie's eyebrows rose as he shouted a warning.

"Musashi's critical shrine maiden has joined the fight!"

"Wh-who are you calling a critical shrine maiden!?"

Even as Asama watched the three ghost ships move away, she breathed a secret sigh of relief.

...Th-thank goodness! That used up all of my internal Blessings!!

Anyway, she thought as she looked back where the crossdresser was walking along Okutama's bow. He was carrying a charcoal grill while Horizon searched for Mitotsudaira, but he waved when he saw her looking.

She had been constantly using divine transmission spells in Magdeburg, so she had not been able to respond to the aerial ships falling from the sky. But with Toori here, his Blessing distribution could replenish her internal Blessings.

"Well, at least that refill made it in time."

She looked down at her butt. Long brown hair with ribbons and cloth wrapped around it was crouching between her two tail ballasts.

"Kimi, why are you hiding behind me?"

"B-because ghosts! Those are ghost ships! Don't you know what's going to happen!? They'll ask for a water ladle, but if you give it to them, they'll scoop up the water to sink your ship!"

"They can't exactly scoop up any water in the air and we aren't even using our virtual ocean right now."

"They can do it because they're ghosts!! They're spirits! Spiiii! Riiiiits!"

She grabbed Asama's butt on "spi" and pulled down and out on "rits". Asama tried to knock her to the ground, but the girl dodged.

It was no use reasoning with a crazy person, so Asama took a step to the side to reveal the ghost ships in the distance. The strange girl collapsed onto her side.

"Th-that was a close one! What if I had fainted!? What would happen then!?"

"To be blunt, could I just ignore you?"

"Not before I faint! Definitely not! But if I do faint, you can do whatever you want!"

"In that case, I think I'd call your mom."

"D-don't make this any scarier than it already is! My mom is a legit samurai, so she doesn't know when not to joke about something! Fine then! You want to turn this into a fight, don't you!?"

Eh? Why? wondered Asama, but she would only be dragged further into it if she went along with it.

So instead, Asama sighed.

"Um, Kimi? Try to calm down. Sure there are some ghost ships here, but I'm stronger than them. There's nothing to worry-..."

...Huh? Why does saying that make me feel so sad?

She looked back down and found Kimi lying limply on the floor. *Huh?* she wondered before realizing the girl had passed out cold.

It can't be, she thought as she turned back around.

"A ghost ship!"

Kimi had fainted because one of them was fast approaching.

After keeping their distance, they had likely decided she had used up her internal Blessings. Sure enough, the Internal Blessing gauge Hanami was displaying had yet to rise above one-third. Toori's refill was being distributed to Asakusa at the moment.

...Which means...!

There were other students trained in being a shrine maiden, but they were up against ghosts here, not monsters. Plus, this was a powerful opponent. She could not destroy the ghost ship at the moment and neither could anyone else she knew, so...

“ ‘Musashino’-san! Take care of this!”

Just as she shouted into the sign frame Hanami lifted up for her, her field of vision shifted forward.

The Musashi had accelerated.

Toshiie did not hesitate to swear when he realized the enemy had escaped.

“Aerial battles really are difficult. I’ll chalk this up to how new at them I am!”

Toshiie continued his inevitable pursuit of the Musashi that had briefly moved away.

They had made the emergency repairs to Asakusa while the ghost ships were held off by the shrine maiden. And when another ghost ship tried to approach now that Asakusa’s repairs were complete...

...They accelerated forward.

The ghost ships would always pursue their target ship, but the Musashi had accelerated horizontally while the ghost ships were focused on their vertical movement. It was only temporary, but that had put some distance between them.

“But still... After them!”

This pursuit had a purpose.

“They can’t make the right angle turn for the marker point at this speed! It was a difficult enough turn already, so keep up the pursuit and ram them if they try to slow down!”

But then the ghost ship in the lead fell apart.

...What!?

Toshiie saw the annihilation of one of his ships.

It occurred directly behind the Musashi. He had positioned it there because he had thought it was the safest place.

After all, the secondary cannons were equipped on the sides and the gunner shrine maiden could not fire there from her position on Oume's bow.

Nevertheless, the ship had been destroyed.

He heard a scraping sound, the ether light scattered like a sandstorm, and both ship and crew were destroyed. The scene quickly vanished as if battered by a storm, but the way the light scattered was odd.

This light also rose as it vanished.

The ghosts had been given a peaceful rest.

"Was it that shrine maiden's anti-ghost shot!?"

His eyes opened wide as he observed Oume which was accelerating away, but he saw no sign that the shrine maiden on its bow had fired an arrow. The girl was focused on peeling off the dancer who was clinging to her butt.

...Then what was this!?

Toshiie's ship had given the vanishing light of the other ship a wide berth, but he suddenly detected a certain scent.

"Curry!?"

"That is correct."

Toshiie saw two people sprinkling a yellow powder from the back of Oume's deck.

One was a fat boy with an arrow sticking into him and the other was a student in a turban.

"We did it!" said the fat boy. "We really did it! The curry exorcism was a success! This has got to improve my popularity with little girls!"

"Curry is from the country of the gods. It can instantly purify even an evil

spirit.”

“You liar!” shouted Toshiie. “Curry is just a collection of spices!! What did you put in there!?”

“Oh!” The turban boy shrugged and shook his head. “All of the spices in curry have been accepted by the gods. I would never dare to object to them.”

“Wait! You’re the one that mixed that, aren’t you!? Don’t tell me you think you’re a god!!”

“Heh.”

The boy shrugged again and threw some curry powder Toshiie’s way.

The ghosts frantically moved the ship out of the way and the boy watched the curry powder scatter fruitlessly into the air. He then looked down on Toshiie.

“Why would you dodge that? I will never forgive someone who wastes curry.”

“Look in a mirror!!”

By the time Toshiie saw Matsu give a powerful nod on his shoulder, they had escaped from the range of the enemy’s curry.

These people are dangerous! Toshiie realized anew.

He did not want to live in a world where someone could destroy a warship by sprinkling curry powder around.

“This is what makes aerial battles so frightening! You never know what’s going to happen!”

“Actually, Toshi, this is a new one for Cookie and me, too.”

Well, those upperclassmen aren’t ghosts, he thought, but he needed to come up with a countermeasure for next time. With that in mind, he spoke to the other remaining ship.

“Approach from upwind! That will give you a safe approach! Also...”

He shouted into the wind toward the Kii Peninsula.

“It’s about time you decided whether you’re on our side or not, Lord Matsunaga!!”

Toward the back of Okutama, Masazumi was on her way to Ariadust Academy. She was currently in the nature district on Okutama's surface and she looked back to the east.

A bug-like form was slowly coming apart in the shadows of the Kii Peninsula.

"A spider?"

No, she had seen that ship once before.

"Is that Lord Matsunaga's castle, the Shigisan?"

What is he going to do? she wondered as she came to a stop.

On the stone path through the trees, she saw the flat spider created in the night sky by the eight attached ships.

She had spoken with Lord Matsunaga both at IZUMO and Magdeburg. He had been an elusive person, but he had still arranged a way to Magdeburg for them as they escaped IZUMO. And in Magdeburg, he had joined the negotiation and supported her in a number of ways.

...He isn't an ally, but I want to believe he isn't an active enemy either.

She lightly hit her own head. If he were to join them, he would effectively be rebelling against Nobunaga. He had already rebelled once, so if he did it again...

"He'll blow himself up along with the Hiragumo tea kettle."

"Maa?"

She smiled bitterly as Tsukinowa rubbed against her cheek to cheer her up.

What is he going to do? she wondered again.

"Maybe it's natural to want a reason for the selfish things you do."

By the time she said that, she saw and heard Matsunaga's answer.

"So you aren't going easy on us, Lord Matsunaga!"


His answer was to fire.

Countless red shells of light cut across the sky as they flew from the Shigisan to the Musashi.

Chapter 88: Waiter at the Corner

CHAPTER 88

"Waiter at the Corner"



In what relationship do you not say
goodbye
And simply pass each other by?
Point Allocation (Consideration)

In what relationship do you not say goodbye

And simply pass each other by?

Point Allocation (Consideration)

In the sky west of the Kii Peninsula, Toshiie moved his ghost ships quickly to the right.

The Shigisan had started firing from the Kii Peninsula to port.

With the Musashi in the center, the two ghost ships raced toward the Musashi's starboard side.

The ghost ships borrowed the Musashi's own speed, so they were swung around the Musashi as if revolving around it. They flew in a wide arc to the Musashi's right side.

And just as Toshiie could see the Musashi ahead and to port, he raised his eyebrows in a smile and gave a shout.

"So you decided to help, Lord Matsunaga! I'll leave the inner corner interference to you!"

A wall of sparks scattered from the entire port side of the Musashi. That was the light of the Shigisan's shells colliding with the Musashi's gravity barriers.

The shellfire continued and the close range allowed a few shots to slip past the barriers.

They hit the Musashi's surface area.

Warning bells immediately started ringing and a few lines of smoke trailed after the ship.

But Toshiie could tell the Shigisan was not letting up. It continued firing its main cannons without a break, but...

...Is he hiding the marker point!?

The Shigisan was slowly moving toward the third marker point.

It was trying to move in front of it.

That would completely block the inner corner for the Musashi, but Toshiie raised his voice as he watched from his ship.

“That’s quite a twisted decision, Lord Matsunaga!”

...This has taken a troublesome but welcome turn!

On Musashino’s front deck, Neshinbara displayed a map and watched the Shigisan’s movement.

Visibility was poor. The attacks were focused on the port side and the light of the destroyed torii emblems was too bright to see his sign frame very well.

The Musashi was currently taking the turn to port while focusing its defenses in that direction.

After learning their lesson in England, they were first defending the outer shell. For gravitational cruising and other reasons, they had to avoid damage to the outer hull.

...From now on, we need to plan for small ships with abnormal speed like those ghost ships.

While recording his thoughts, Neshinbara checked the sign frame map to see what was happening beyond the protective light and sound that was focused on the outer hull even more than in the past.

“Currently...”

The Shigisan was approaching from ahead and to the port.

Its intent was clear: it would hold the inner corner and force the Musashi into the outer corner.

That showed a lack of fear over the Musashi hitting the ship. The Shigisan was trying to take the position between the Musashi and the marker point at the entrance to the provisional border cutting across the Kii Peninsula.

It was putting itself in danger to stop the Musashi, but the corner of Neshinbara’s mouth rose and he gave a shout.

“Honestly... He’s just as much of a contrarian as I’d heard!”

Matsunaga had promised Masazumi a battle on the border to his territory, but he was currently moving out beyond that provisional border. He was breaking his promise, but...

...If we can get past the Shigisan, we're free to move along the border!

He was opening up the provisional border for them, but he was not abandoning his job as a member of P.A. Oda either.

Then, thought Neshinbara.

“Let’s stubbornly force our way through and travel that border.”

He spoke it aloud to make a promise to himself. He also gave instructions to the port side defenders and the damaged surface areas.

“Let’s go! It’s time we left Europe!”

Toshiie saw something as he circled around in his pursuit of the Musashi.

The Musashi accelerated.

“You’re kidding!”

They had already been moving too fast to make the turn, so if they accelerated now, they would fail to check the marker point and would officially be ignoring the course designated by the Testament Union.

That would give plenty of justification for attacking the Musashi as well as a means of preventing other Testament Union nations from allying with them.

So after a gasp of realization, Toshiie corrected himself.

“No, please don’t be kidding! Please don’t! Accelerate even more and fly on through!”

He could guess what Musashi was thinking.

...Are they trying to accelerate away from the battlefield!?

They would likely escape to Kantou and either have the Kantou forces protect them or hide themselves there. Even if the Testament Union accused them of ignoring their designated course, that Eurocentric organization had little

influence in Kantou. Also...

“K.P.A. Italia has lost its power.”

So did they choose a more forceful solution? he wondered as the Musashi accelerated. The ghost ships were swung in their arcing path by the Musashi’s acceleration.

“...Eh?”

Something isn’t right, he realized. This is weird.

...What is this?

The Musashi had remained visible to port for a while now. Even as his vision was swinging around in an arc, he had remembered to keep his eyes on the enemy. That was his intention anyway.

But the scene beyond the Musashi had changed. Before, he had seen the Kii Peninsula running parallel to the eight giant ships, but now he saw the Shigisan and...

“From Sakai to Osaka!?”

They were turning.

The Musashi was making the turn despite its excessive speed.

“Are you going to do the impossible, Musashi!?”

A single figure could be seen on the Shigisan’s central ship which looked more like a disk with a lid than a boat.

The man sipping a teacup of sake on the edge of the tatami-covered roof was Matsunaga.

He sat with his legs crossed and the teacup of sake held to his lips, but he still watched it all.

...Ohh.

The Musashi was turning.

His ship was firing from close range and a blizzard of light blew between them.

But the Musashi was turning even as it accelerated. It made a rapid turn as if scraping up against the Shigisan's extended legs.

"Not bad."

Watching from above, the trick behind their high-speed turn was obvious.

"So you used our shellfire, did you?"

That shellfire had occurred on the inside of the Musashi's turn, so they had opened a massive number of gravity barriers on the port side.

But the Musashi had done something else to strengthen those barriers: they had weakened the atmospheric buffering on the port side.

The ship creaked and the metal wept, but the unbuffered port side felt the resistance of the wind and slowed down.

"And at the same time, you accelerated with only the starboard side."

As he watched, acceleration light exploded on the starboard side.

It slowed on the left and sped up on the right, thus it made a rapid turn.

It was a modification of the technique used to jump over Kuki's fleet. They braked on one side and accelerated with the other. They had used the front and back sides with Kuki, but now they used the left and right.

...That was quite a leap in logic there.

"But I wouldn't have it any other way."

The Musashi currently looked like a group of boats breaking through glowing rapids. Matsunaga confirmed its path as he heard the eight ships creaking from the port and starboard speed difference, felt the wind they whipped up, and saw the glow from the fragments of light.

...At this rate, they'll just barely pass through the marker point.

Musashi had won this round, so he slapped his knee and gave a shout.

"Okay, get the Shigisan moving! Start moving to the south! Let's push the Musashi to the outer corner!!"

Those instructions meant one thing.

“This is getting interesting!!”

As he swung around with the Musashi, Toshiie saw the situation continue to develop.

The Shigisan was moving. The Musashi was circling around its outer edge, so it was going to push them southward.

The Musashi had no way of fighting back. They were pushed right up to the edge of the Shigisan’s circular shape and the Shigisan had made itself the arc of the inner corner.

The Musashi would have just barely hit the marker point.

They would have been able to angle the marker ejector to fire into the marker point.

But if they could not move in any closer than the Shigisan, they could never reach the point.

The point at the entrance of the provisional border fired its red light into the sky. It was telling the Musashi where it was and where to fire their marker.

It was located ahead and to port of the Musashi, but the Shigisan’s presence would keep the Musashi away. The light rising from below was shifted far to the left from where the marker ejector on Musashino’s bow would pass by.

As he was powerfully swung to the outside, Toshiie saw the straight line of the Kii Peninsula’s western coast.

From his vantage point, he could see the Musashi, the scattering light, the Shigisan, and then Osaka in the distance. And at that very moment, he saw a few silhouettes backlit by the shattering light.

Some people were standing upside down below Musashino’s bow and working on the course marker ejector.

They were trying to remove the ejector so they could manually aim and fire it.

The work was being done from the outside.

The marker ejector was a light emitter with a diameter of about two meters. It was embedded in the bottom of Musashino, but it still had a limited range of movement.

They needed to remove it from its base and aim it at the marker point on the surface.

The work was being done by Persona-kun, whose feet were plastered to the outer hull by Nenji and whose waist was held in place by Itoken. He was using a giant Phillips head screwdriver to quickly remove the bolts locking it to the base. He placed all of the removed bolts in a bag hanging from his waist hard point, but he was working so quickly he removed all eight in no time at all.

However, he ran into a problem even after removing all of the bolts.

“Is the creaking and bending of the ship squeezing it in place!?”

As Nenji had said, the ejector would not come out.

The outer shell had been badly bent as they took the turn. The light emitter was about five meters long, but the ship’s frame had squeezed around it, preventing it from coming out.

Persona-kun grabbed and pulled on the hook used to remove it for repairs, but...

“...!”

It shook and he heard the cry of straining metal, but it only moved out a few centimeters. Having Itoken pull on his waist produced the same result, so Itoken gave a dashing smile.

“This is difficult, isn’t it!?”

The color red began to fill their surroundings. The red light from the surface was starting to pass by in the sky to port. Once they passed the light, they would have failed, but...

“A ghost ship!?”

One of the ships was approaching from the south to ram them at full speed.

Persona-kun briefly glanced over at its rapid approach, but...

“...!!”

He resumed his work. Nenji raised his eyebrows and Itoken gave another dashing smile.

“We will help!”

“We’re all in this together!”

As soon as they said that, a voice shouted down at the charging ghost ship as it whipped up the wind.

“Even if you have converted from Protestantism to Catholicism, a ghost is still a ghost. So...”

It was a half-dragon. Urquiaga was flying down with a giant metal rod. The metal rod was over ten meters long and he swung it down in a straight line.

“Catholic Inquisition Set #452: Ghost Ship Sinking Tool ‘Palo Bautismo’!”

The strike more bisected than crushed and light scattered everywhere.

The ghost ship was chopped in two and instantly destroyed.

Light scattered and rose to heaven.

Their demise was accompanied by a voice from the inside end of the ejector.

“Move out of the way. I’ll hit it through the padding.”

The voice was Noriki’s and he could be heard preparing to attack.

“I’ll hit it thrice and open the path forward.”

Matsunaga distinctly saw the red lights cross paths.

It had been forcefully done. If the Testament Union learned how they had done it, they were sure to protest.

But they had done it all the same.

They had not made an excuse, let time take care of it, ignored it, or run away.

“So those idiots pulled it off.”

The course the Musashi would use was the same one it had used to escape

from Mikawa. Back then, it had traveled east to west, but this time it was west to east. And...

...Back then, they were being pursued by armed Portuguese trade ships and other Tsirhc Testament Union ships.

Now, they were pursued by P.A. Oda.

When would they realize what that meant and the value of what they had gained in Europe?

“Well, they are idiots, after all.”

“Heyyyyyy!!”

Beyond the passing light, a crossdresser raised his hands on the front deck of the central rear ship.

The idiot shouted over with a bowl of seaweed on his head.

“Old man! We promised to lend each other porn games, but you thought you could bully a cute kid like me just because you’re an old man, didn’t you!? I’ll seaweed you with everything I’ve got! ...Listen! My seaweed is horrifyingly lukewarm! So do as you’re told and let me borrow the limited edition Far Eastern history version of ‘Soapy Conquest – Bathtime with Luís Fróis’! ...Ah, stop, stop, Horizon! Don’t pile on more bowls! Wait, is that three with trays in between? Four? Wait, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t!”

It was a mystery what the crossdresser was trying to say, so...

“You really are an idiot, aren’t you?”

As the idiot raised his hands again to say something, they passed by and the bowls toppled over.

That idiot knows how to keep things noisy to the end, thought Matsunaga as he looked to the academy on the central rear ship.

He spotted a familiar face on the bridge out front.

It was Sakai.

The man waved a hand in greeting next to an automaton tending to an ether flower garden.

...He hasn't changed.

He had been the same in the past. When that kid had arrived on Suleiman's introduction, he had approached casually with an excellent spear on his back.

Matsunaga had heard he had picked a fight with the pope, so he had always thought of Sakai as an idiot.

...I'm trying to stay smart myself.

Matsunaga had moved between many different factions, actively changed the flow of events in the world, and made new discoveries. The long houses used in the Musashi's residential districts were based on the defensive structures he had thought up for his castle.

Idiots were quick to rely on the smart.

They sure can be annoying.

But, he thought. I'm smart, so I can tell how much different idiots might change the world.

And he had seen the greatest of those.

"Nobunaga the 'fool'."

As he spoke those words, the Musashi finished passing by. The light scattered and the wind vanished, but...

"————"

He heard the Musashi accelerate. He was worried about their fuel consumption, but hurrying was probably best since P.A. Oda would continue to pursue them.

But instead of looking back, Matsunaga kept his gaze facing forward. He saw the dark ocean and dark sky of night and Shikoku between them. And in the background...

"Kuki's managed to organize...looks like about three hundred ships for the pursuit."

In the dark woods, Masazumi stood on the stone pavement and dealt with two

sign frames. One was with the idiot.

“Honestly, I won’t go easy on that old man next time I see him!”

“Sure, sure. Go right ahead. You’ll see Lord Matsunaga at the – do you call it an event? – in Edo, right?”

“Yeah! But I’ll be lined up for all the new stuff there!!”

“I see, I see.”

She nodded and turned to the other sign frame. This one displayed Neshinbara who was sending a few pieces of information along with the video.

Novice: “We’re on a stable course for now. It’s the opposite route from when we escaped Mikawa, so we thankfully know what’s coming.”

He then added a quick “but”.

Novice: “Lord Matsunaga has gathered in a defensive formation behind us.”

Vice President: “Why? Well...I can actually make a pretty good guess.”

Novice: “I won’t ask whether that guess is about his reasons or what’s about to happen.”

Four Eyes: “I see you’re showing off again.”

Novice: “I was not! That’s what I actually thought!!”

Mal-Ga: “Ow, ow, ow, ow...”

I can’t argue with that, thought Masazumi as she checked the divine transmission settings. Asama was recording the conversation but not sending it to Aoi. She had likely decided to wait until things were a little calmer.

...Asama’s getting stuck with all the worst jobs.

But at the same time, she was worried about Matsunaga. He had been a hard man to understand, but he had seemed to have a unique direction to him. And now...

“Why is the Shigisan blocking the way for the Oda forces?”

Neshinbara was naturally the one to answer.

Novice: “I assume you know that Matsunaga Danjou Hisahide rebelled against

Nobunaga twice. He was forgiven the first time, but he holed up in his own castle the second time. Nobunaga offered to forgive him if he handed over a famous tea kettle known as the Hiragumo, but he refused and blew himself up along with the kettle.”

And...

Novice: “Lord Matsunaga has already rebelled once. It was right after he was appointed Nobunaga’s attendant.”

Flat Vassal: “Then...does that mean this is his second rebellion!?”

Masazumi understood why Adele was shouting, so she chose to speak up.

Vice President: “He moved the Shigisan beyond his provisional border and let the Musashi pass. If they criticize him for that, you could say letting us onto the Kii Peninsula’s border was his rebellion.”

After all...

Vice President: “I said at Magdeburg we would defeat Nobunaga and Hashiba. He let us go, so it wouldn’t be surprising to see that as an acceptance of Nobunaga and Hashiba’s destruction.”

Also...

Vice President: “If he opposes the pursuers from P.A. Oda, this will definitely be a rebellion.”

Masazumi let her shoulders droop when she realized no one was replying.

Then, a sign frame appeared next to her face.

Asama: “If Toori-kun says anything, please tell him I told you not to tell him.”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi as she closed Neshinbara’s sign frame.

“Maa.”

Yeah, don’t worry about it, she thought while walking toward the academy.

She had a feeling going there would not accomplish much of anything, but...

...What is this?

They had lost Anne.

And now something similar was about to happen.

...What is it?

A boiling feeling sort of like irritation filled her stomach.

She had never felt this before.

As she wondered what it was, she hung her head and continued toward the academy.

“Lord Matsunaga.”

You must be a smart person, so...

“Please don’t make a mistake here.”

At the entrance to the Kii Peninsula, Matsunaga faced Kuki’s three hundred aerial ships.

They had all stopped in front of him in a fan formation.

All three hundred ships had their cannons trained on him.

...And is that Shirasagi Mk. II managing them all from a distance back there?

Toshiie had continued in pursuit of the Musashi and another fleet would have left P.A. Oda’s stronghold in Kinki to move south to Mikawa, but he was facing the fleet put together by M.H.R.R.

“I’m rebelling...”

“Lord Matsunaga! No, let me call you my upperclassman!” Kuki addressed him via divine transmission. “Our rightful enemy at the moment is Musashi! They are Matsudaira who become an enemy of Hashiba and threaten P.A. Oda! There is no reason to fight amongst ourselves here!”

“You really are an idiot, Kuki. ...There is a reason.”

Kuki did not reply. *He’s a smart one*, thought Matsunaga. *If he’d replied, I might’ve dragged him down my line of thinking.*

So...

“The thing is, I like idiots. The idiots will do things no one else would ever think of and that has a way of changing the world.”

But...

“You have villains, traitors, and backstabbers, but what’s the difference between them and the people who actually change the world?”

“Please stop stalling for time, upperclassman!”

“Just listen.” Matsunaga stood on the Shigisan’s roof to view it all. “Villains, traitors, and backstabbers are those who destroy the traditional bonds but fail to become an absolute victor. They’re the ones who end up losing somewhere along the line or were found lacking at some point.”

“Then...!” said Kuki. “If you disappear here, you will only be known as a villain!”

That’s fine. After all, Nobunaga’s still around.”

Listen.

“I serve Nobunaga.”

On the high-speed ship’s deck, Kuki understood what Matsunaga was saying.

...So that’s it!

Matsunaga Hisahide had done quite a lot. He had slain his lord and called in the chaos of the warring states by killing a shogun, the leader of the warrior class. He had also burned Todai-ji and its Great Buddha, a symbol of faith.

He was the individual who had risen to power by destroying the nation’s previous values.

That was why he had a poor reputation among those who did not know him well, but...

...He led the people of his territory well.

Kuki knew someone else who was similar.

“Nobunaga... Our chancellor.”

“That’s right.” Matsunaga smiled. “Nobunaga is the Demon Lord of the Six

Heavens who burned Mt. Hiei, seized control of the shogun clan I tried to crush, and fought the Ikkou-Ikki. ...Nobunaga did even more than I did.”

But...

“That was all the work of a ‘fool’ taking what I did even further.”

“Then...!”

“Kuki,” called Matsunaga. “After everything I did, I found an even greater destroyer than myself. And I even realized that destroyer would take good care of me. According to the history recreation, my first rebellion would be forgiven, right? And, well, I’m smart.”

So...

“A while back, I was thinking of making some random rebellion, using that as an interpretation, and retiring. If Nobunaga conquered the world, then it was the same as me conquering the world.”

Yes, thought Kuki.

...This man...

“Lord Matsunaga! You are truly a loyal retainer!”

After all...

“You found someone who might be able to destroy the chancellor! But you chose not to crush them! Instead, you gave them the room to grow and let them live!”

He gave his conclusion.

“You intend to let Chancellor Nobunaga defeat them and become a true destroyer who can face any kind of destruction!!”

“Yes... That seems like the most interesting result. For a destroyer like me, anyway. Now, listen.”

Matsunaga smiled.

Masazumi listened to the intercepted internal P.A. Oda divine transmission the

PR council sent to her.

She heard what Matsunaga said.

“P.A. Oda and especially Hashiba, listen very carefully. Nobunaga is a ‘fool’, yet also tries to do things the proper way. So it’s possible Nobunaga will be properly slain by Akechi.”

But...

“Listen, P.A. Oda, Hashiba, and all others who will continue on after me and after Nobunaga. ...You are to defeat the ones who will destroy even Nobunaga. Do you understand what that means? I’m telling you to defeat the history recreation, or destiny, or whatever you want to call it. The destruction I’m leaving to you is the destruction of Matsudaira’s victory.”

After all...

“If Matsudaira grows, they will become our greatest enemy, both militarily and historically. I want to see whether those who follow after me can destroy the greatest assignment I prepared for them. If you can do that...”

Masazumi heard him give a quiet laugh.

“Then even if I’m known as a villain, I’ll know that I didn’t make a single mistake in how I dealt with the past or the future.”

The Shigisan spread out before Kuki’s eyes.

The spidery ship pointed its eight connected ships his way.

“I’m gonna leave behind something that can destroy even me,” said Matsunaga.

“Then we will destroy you here and crush that future destruction because we are not as great as you!”

“Shaja. That’s fine. That just means you’re loyal.”

Matsunaga opened an *insha kotob*.

“Musashi Vice President, you’re listening to this, aren’t you?”

Masazumi heard Matsunaga's voice from the sign frame that suddenly opened.

"I'm sure you were listening to all that, so listen to this too."

He did not give her a chance to speak, so it probably was not a two-way connection.

"First, tell that naked idiot that I was a monstrous liar. I hate being called a good person more than anything else. To me, nothing's cooler than being known as the villain of this chaotic age. Got that?"

"Judge."

Masazumi nodded and thought about him again.

...He's our enemy.

That intercepted conversation had clearly treated Musashi as an enemy, but...

...He's definitely an enemy that stands parallel to us.

They were two mutually exclusive sides.

He had decided to step down and leave the fight to the next generation, so...

"I will use you as an example of a direct opponent."

He had left all of the important things unsaid, but he had surely been a straightforward enemy.

He had judged them and always faced them head-on to bring it all to his side's next generation. When she thought back to the meetings shared with him, Masazumi was certain of it.

He had a single purpose in having things his way.

He had guided and supported P.A. Oda, so he had given them the ultimate enemy. He would then judge whether he had done the right thing by seeing whether P.A. Oda could defeat that enemy or not.

...He's seeing whether he did the right thing or not without allowing for any compromise.

That was all. That had been important enough to build his resolve and he would have his way here.

Masazumi thought on the word “enemy”.

But Matsunaga suddenly said more.

“Listen. You’re at a bit of a disadvantage, so I’ll do you a little favor, okay?”

“Eh?”

Her confusion was immediately answered.

“I’ll tell you one thing about P.A. Oda’s Genesis Project.”

That being...

“It is to end the world but not to let it end.”

...What?

Masazumi frowned at Matsunaga’s words. What kind of phrasing was that?

She would have understood if he had said “end the world and reset it”.

...That would mean to end it and then begin anew.

But that was not what he had said. Nor had it been a loop where they would “end it, redo it, and repeat”.

“To end the world but not to let it end?”

The positive and negative forms of the verb were used together. It was a contradictory and incompatible phrasing.

It was a parallel phrasing.

That was why she questioned it, but...

“Wait! Lord Matsunaga!”

Nothing had yet been made publicly known about the Genesis Project. She had concluded only the high-ranking members of P.A. Oda knew what it actually was. Yet now he was leaking a small portion of it to Matsudaira, their future enemy.

“Is this your excuse for rebelling!?”

The answer came in another form. She heard a rumbling like distant thunder from the sky behind her.

That was the sound of battle and she ground her teeth when she heard it.

“Don’t choose to die! Fight it, Lord Matsunaga!”

Chapter 89: Underclassman at the Destination

CHAPTER 89

"Underclassman at the Destination"



What am I supposed to do about this?
What am I supposed to hope for?
Point Allocation (Achievement)

What am I supposed to do about this?

What am I supposed to hope for?

Point Allocation (Achievement)

The flames of war blazed in an exchange of light and sound.

The provider of those flames was a fleet of three hundred ships. The receiver was a large circular ship with eight attached ships. But the Hiragumo-style Shigisan did more than receive the attacks. It rearranged and redirected its eight attached ships to destroy the enemy formation by concentrating its fire and defenses.

Matsunaga instructed each ship from the roof while protected by a defense barrier.

He fought back, but far more attacks were sent his way. The Shigisan was damaged, beginning with the outer spider legs, and five of those attached ships were already trailing smoke.

Still, he did not fall back.

“Don’t fall back, men!”

“Shaja!”

There was strength in that reply. He had personally selected every one of them.

They all loved new things and excitement almost too much. He had also selected extra carefully for this particular occasion.

And he had made it clear this would happen.

The ones who had wished to come with him had smiled and said the following: “We’ve pretty much died a few times already working under you.”

I put them through a lot, he belatedly realized.

And so he did not fall back.

He believed there was something like a path behind them.

...I will create that path.

The way he saw it, he was here to change the current age and create a new one. He was the reformer of this age.

That was why he had travelled down that path, so falling back was unthinkable.

On his command, the Shigisan fired and destroyed, but Kuki's formation was flexible. If they tore into it, it would fill back in. If they sliced it apart, it would sew itself back together. So...

"Devour it from the edges!"

If they crushed the edges of the formation, it could not be filled in or sewn together. A normal ship would be relentlessly hammered if it tried that, but the Shigisan had its attached ships. The central ship solidified its central defenses and the others formed pairs, one attacking and one defending, to wear down the fan-shaped enemy formation from four different sides.

They crushed and struck but were destroyed and pounded in exchange.

How many did they bring down? Matsunaga lost count after twenty, but...

"————"

As the Shigisan's first attached ship fired on the enemy's upper left side, fire spewed from it.

Matsunaga looked up as the first ship burst into flames.

The captain of the blazing ship sent him an *insha kotob*. An old man with a white Far East boy's uniform coat worn over a P.A. Oda uniform stood on the already burning bridge.

"Do you need a shield, Lord Matsunaga?"

"That you, Oka? Don't worry about it. I'm already holed up in my castle. Go make a name for yourself."

"Sha-..."

The man trailed off and used a different word with a smile.

“Judge. So I’m being kicked out of this losing battle? Finally.”

The burning ship separated, the captain and crew saluted, and the *insha kotob* vanished.

The blazing ship moved forward. It cut into and crushed the enemy formation, but was also crushed itself.

Similarly...

“We’ll be going on ahead.”

Others continued forward.

“We’ll stay here by your side.”

Others stayed in place as a shield even as the flames tore them apart.

But they still had cannons and defenses left, so...

“Okay.”

As they continued to attack, Matsunaga viewed the enemy.

“Okay!”

Their wearing down of the enemy formation and the attacks by the attached ships had left the fan shape much smaller. That meant the enemy was packed closer together and they were moving in toward the Shigisan.

After confirming the enemy’s approach, Matsunaga inhaled.

The enemy was drawing close. Their shells were landing quite near him and tearing into his central ship.

He suddenly realized all of the attached ships had grown silent.

“Thank you.”

Matsunaga thought on the meaning of him being the last one left.

...Even if none of them understood me, they didn’t misunderstand me either.

So he slowly opened a certain *insha kotob*.

It was used to approve the Shigisan’s self-destruct.

This would fulfill the history recreation and his hand moved toward the signature made of light.

“...?”

But another *insha kotob* appeared next to it.

The sender field contained the name of the individual he had recognized as his superior.

“Present the Hiragumo tea kettle to me and I will forgive you of this rebellion.”

He laughed at those words. He laughed out loud.

“You...”

He slowly lowered his hand.

“Thank you.”

He made his decision.

Matsunaga thought amid the shaking and light of the Shigisan exploding below his feet.

...What's going to happen!?

There are some real idiots out there. On one side, there are the idiots who outdo even me. On the other side, there are the idiots who have my approval.

That first group was always forgiving me.

But that second group was a little different. In Magdeburg, one of them asked if I'd like to go to Musashi after I retired.

That wasn't a decision based on forgiveness, blame, killing, or being killed.

She just told me to go there and do as I liked.

...That's the idea of 'not losing anything' that the naked idiot kid and his princess were talking about.

But I'm the one that destroys. Whenever something happens, I'm the one that brings destruction. That's why I'm known as a destroyer.

I create a new age by destroying whatever it is that lies up ahead. That's what I do.

And that's why I approved of those idiots back then.

I decided that, led by that nudist and his princess, those idiots could do what we can't.

They're sure to create something. Even if they have nothing to begin with, they'll approve of everything, accept it in, and create something.

We're different. We approve of things, accept them in, and yet destroy them for what comes next.

We destroy to gain more. So...

...What's going to happen!?

What will happen when the ultimate destroyer clashes with the ultimate creator?

We're the ones that destroy this chaotic age, so what will happen when we clash with those who are creating a new age?

And...

...This is what you call history, isn't it!?

On the one hand, you have the victors who will accept history and create more. On the other, you have the losers who accept history and then destroy it. What will happen when they collide, no holds barred?

What if the destroyer wins?

What if the creator wins?

I don't know what will happen then, but...

"Yes."

Both sides have my approval, so I'll win no matter what.

"It's time to destroy yet another age."

With those words, the destruction of the Shigisan was completed.

“That kid left it all unfinished!”

On the nighttime plain, Yoshitsune’s eyebrows rose as she viewed the sign frame map made by the Satou Brothers.

“Honestly!”

She revved Shizuka’s accelerator full blast. The engine roared into the night and all of the mechanical horses around her produced similar roaring whinnies from their engines.

“————!!”

After waiting for the noise to come to a natural stop, Yoshitsune spoke quietly.

“Farewell, Matsunaga. Keep on destroying things in hell. I’m sure that’s what you’ll do.”

Just as she adjusted her position in Shizuka’s seat, the Satou Brothers held out a new sign frame. This one displayed a map of the Mikawa region, but something was crossing over the Musashi’s route forward.

One of the Satou Brothers explained.

“Three aerial warships are leaving P.A. Oda territory and circling west toward the Musashi along the Sagarmatha to Tian Shan corridor. They will most likely make contact within three minutes.”

“Which ships?”

“Testament,” said one of the Satou Brothers.

“Based on the acoustic signature,” said the other one, “the Kiyosu, the Sunomata, and the Nagahama. The Kiyosu is from the main force directly under Nobunaga’s command, the Sunomata is a high-speed ship, and the Nagahama is a transport ship modified into a light striking ship. And...about one hundred high-speed ships are following them.”

“What, are they trying to do the Lepanto again? Anyway, who’s the commander?”

“Most likely Maeda Toshiie as he is on the front lines closest to the Musashi.”

“I see,” muttered Yoshitsune as she straightened up.

She could hear the shellfire of the distant battle and she raised her right hand toward the rumbling.

“Prepare to fire. We need to give the Musashi a nice welcome.”

The Musashi was being pursued from the north.

They were currently flying through the sky halfway across the Kii Peninsula.

Mikawa’s bay was coming into view in the distance and they could see red ether light occasionally rising from the bay.

Nothing had changed since the loss of Mikawa three months prior. The abandoned land was being left to naturally recover from the ether disturbance.

They raced through the night sky on a straight shot back to their starting point.

Masazumi explained to the others what course they would take from there.

Vice President: “Our course will continue east to the land port where we fought the Pope-Chancellor. From there, we’ll cut east across the bay that was Mikawa for the shortest path to the opposite bank! The route we’ve chosen was used to pass above the old city of Mikawa and New Nagoya Castle to deliver supplies. ...Once we reach the opposite bank, it’s only thirty kilometers east to Mikatagahara. We’ll join Qing-Takeda there and ensure our safety by beginning the history recreation of the Battle of Mikatagahara!!”

Silver Wolf: “Is Mikawa’s neutrality still in effect? Mikawa was annexed by Musashi, after all.”

Marube-ya: “Abandoning its neutrality would have introduced a risk of P.A. Oda taking over, so the Testament Union preserved it ‘to monitor a possible spread of the disaster and to help Mikawa recover’.”

Vice President: “Honestly. To think we’d be thanking the Pope-Chancellor now.”

But as the Musashi hurried across the Kii Peninsula to Mikawa, a pursuer approached on a sharp trajectory from the north.

The high-speed ship was a galley-style Kraken-class. It had removed a few of its

side cannons and replaced them with accelerators to catch up to the Musashi.

“I have determined that is the Sunomata, a Hashiba high-speed ship. Over!”

As Suzu detected its form from Musashino’s bridge, she stroked the model with her fingers and had a thought.

...It’s...light?

She thought it was a simply designed ship.

It was mostly made of wood and seemed to have residential areas, but it felt handmade. Neshinbara explained over the divine chat and her sign frame spoke it aloud for her.

Novice: “When Hashiba was still a newcomer, Sunomata Castle was the ‘One Night Castle’ he built as a foothold in the impregnable territory of his enemy. They called it a castle, but it was really just a large-scale formation. Hashiba simplified it all down to the point that it was a castle in name only but still had the bare minimum of functionality. He used it to outwit his enemy who was trapped by tradition and format and that led Nobunaga to recognize his skill.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. Enough commentary on history, nerd. Can you tell us anything about the cheap galley that’s actually approaching us?”

Novice: “It was simply made, so it was used as a training ship after the battle. But that also means it would have been easy to modify. That’s why they added on the accelerators and...some cannons I’m guessing. But...”

Neshinbara continued his explanation.

Novice: “Even with the extra accelerators, it’s going to have difficulty catching up to the Musashi. If it wants to sink the Musashi on its first pass, it would probably have to ram us, but its current trajectory isn’t right for that, is it?”

Musashino: “Based on our predictions, it will likely join with the ghost ship and fly alongside us. Over.”

As Suzu listened to their discussion, she sensed a certain movement.

It was Toshiie.

His ghost ship swung below the Musashi like a pendulum and flew toward the

port side. It was flying over to the rapidly approaching Sunomata. The Sunomata's path was straight to fly parallel to the Musashi, but...

...They're...going to hit?

As if to answer her question, Toshiie's ghost ship flew toward the Sunomata's stern. The ghost ship attached to the Sunomata where the oar-shaped accelerators were installed pointing backwards.

A moment later, the Sunomata sped up.

It had accelerated using the ghost ship's ability to borrow its opponent ship's speed.

"They're...coming!"

Suzu knew the enemy was approaching.

Her hand moved the model of the Sunomata so it tilted and rushed toward the Musashi.

It was using the ghost ship as an accelerator, so the Sunomata's speed equaled the Musashi's. That allowed the Kraken-class galley to race around the Musashi and begin firing.

In an instant, fragments of gravity barriers scattered from various points on the Musashi.

But the Musashi could see the Kii Peninsula's exit. Its course took it a bit to the northeast where something had come into view.

"Mikawa's...land port!"

That was where they had fought a battle and rescued Horizon.

Me: "Hey, look! That's where I managed to touch Horizon's boob and save her life!"

Righteousness: "How can you people stand to have him lead you?"

Almost Everyone: "Well..."

They passed over it as they spoke, but...

Silver Wolf: “Most of the land port has collapsed as well. Natural erosion has caused the land to collapse over a wide area around the bay.”

Suzu’s senses perceived the same thing. From the surface to deep down in the earth, the land port had slid in toward the bay. The area around the bay had collapsed into a mortar-like depression.

Asama: “Once the ley lines have calmed down, I think the environmental gods will increase the protection of this land to help it recover. I’m recording data and sending it to IZUMO. They’ll probably send it up to Kyou.”

Suzu could only nod.

But just as they started across the bay, her senses picked up something.

The ocean below had been destroyed by the out-of-control ley line reactors three months before. Almost the entirety of the former city of Mikawa had been gouged out to make room for this water, but...

...This is where...New Nagoya Castle was.

At the very moment Musashi passed over the center of the blast zone, she felt a shaking below her feet.

...Eh?

There was only seawater below and further measurement showed there was a mud ocean floor beneath it.

But the ley lines here were badly disturbed and anyone with sight would be seeing occasional ether light rising toward the sky a bit to the north.

Suzu was currently receiving sensory information from the Musashi’s sense devices.

At the bottom of her senses, she perceived something suddenly welling up from the center of the blast.

“...!?”

Suzu felt shaking, but she did not know why.

...H-huh!?

Something was wrong with Musashino's bridge. No...

...What...is this!?

She felt what seemed like several objects, figures, voices, or bodies of heat. Someone was there.

“———”

She was falling over. Her body had reacted to something moving out of place, but...

...Nothing has...moved!?

It was me that moved, she realized without knowing what it meant. But when she reached a hand out into empty space seeking assistance, she definitely felt something there. Someone had taken her hand.

And...

“...!?”

She woke up.

Her mind grew clear. The sounds of everything around her grew more distinct as if she had surfaced from some deep water.

...Wh-what!?

She realized she was standing on the bridge. She was sweating, she breathed a sigh of relief, and she worked to perceive her surroundings.

“ ‘Musashi...no’-san...!?”

Everyone had collapsed or fallen to the floor. They had all fallen to port which was north and some had apparently been lightly thrown through the air.

“Musashino” gave a quiet groan and quickly fixed her lifted skirt and corrected her collar.

“It seems the motor for the base of my left leg has bent somewhat. Over.”

“O-okay. What...was that?”

“Judge. I detected a powerful ether disturbance, but I did not expect it to have such strong directionality. I can predict that the damage to the ley line was

different than expected. And..."

She stood up and walked over while dragging her left leg a little. She spoke without waiting for the others to stand back up.

"The Musashi's acceleration has been disturbed! Everyone, please recover from our lowered speed as quickly as possible. Suzu-sama, please locate the enemy ship. Over."

Once "Musashino" finished speaking, a sudden tremor filled the Musashi.

While flying alongside them, the Sunomata had used their lowered speed to quickly fill the gap between them.

Chapter 90: Mercenary of the Nostalgic Sky

CHAPTER 90

"Mercenary of the Nostalgic Sky"



Now

What to do?

Point Allocation (Come)

Now

What to do?

Point Allocation (Come)

This really takes me back, thought Toshiie as he commanded the Sunomata in the sky above Mikawa's bay.

He never fought in aerial battles, but he was still quite attached to this ship. He had helped build the ship in enemy territory for the history recreation to make a name for Hashiba.

...Wasn't that because our enemy, Saitou, had set up a barrier for anti-air defense?

As a part of the history recreation an actual castle on the ground would have worked just as well.

By using prefabricated parts, they could have had giants and demonic long lived carry in the pieces and set it up in only four hours.

But either due to the Musashi's influence on the current age or to show off the Far East's aerial ship technology, having an aerial ship for a castle was a sort of status symbol in the Far East.

So as rare as it was for her to do so, Hashiba had insisted on building a ship.

And she had been the one to put in the most effort.

She had worked hard to gather the personnel and materials needed to build Sunomata Castle quickly enough to warrant the name "One Night Castle".

At the time, aerial ships had taken months to build, but she had used cloth-covered logs to build something that would at least float.

...That was really more of an aerial raft than a ship.

But she had indeed built it in a single day.

When it had appeared floating above enemy territory, most of the enemy had laughed and called it a piece of junk, but no one in the Oda clan had laughed. Building an aerial ship in a night meant they could immediately send a surprise

attack fleet into enemy territory as long as they had the personnel and supplies needed to surpass the enemy's anti-air barriers.

“Ever since then, Shibata took a real liking to Hashiba.”

The Sunomata had bordered the Nagara River, so Toshiie himself had sent supplies downstream on rafts for Hashiba to collect.

There had been weak points in Hashiba's design, so he and Narimasa had guided the reinforcing parts down the river.

Hashiba still talked about it and tried to repay them even though she had already helped them countless times. Still, she insisted that she could never fully repay them because they had supported her when a single mistake would have ended everything for her.

It was all so nostalgic.

This ship had been the starting point for the Oda clan's current cooperative spirit.

The exterior had completely changed and it was now a proper high-speed striking ship instead of a mere raft, but it still contained traces of its original form.

“Now, fire.”

It had not originally had cannons, so they had used personal anti-air cannons and spells. At the time, they had laughed at how they were all commanders and yet were stuck acting like common soldiers on that ship.

“How about we circle around above them?”

It would have stalled out back then, but...

“Let's go!”

Those two words alone were the same.

“It's so light!”

From Okutama's surface, Yoshiyasu watched the enemy flip through the sky.

The Sunomata seemed to fly freely around the Musashi rather than through the sky. It was powered by the ghost ship which borrowed the Musashi's speed, so it could fly up, down, far, close, front, or back.

Its cannons fired homing shots. That homing ability was weakened by their speedy flight, so its aim was careless.

But few of the shells missed. Because the careless trajectories were hard to predict, they struck the Musashi and sent gravity barrier light scattering everywhere.

...If only I could send out Righteousness!

She could not because the Musashi was flying so quickly. She technically could send it out, but a God of War could not sustain this speed as long as the massive ship. Flying alongside the Musashi would drain her fuel and send her crashing to the ground in just a few minutes. Righteousness also needed some repairs, so she had left it in Musashino's maintenance hangar and made her way up to Okutama's surface.

"I thought I could get some information if I visited the academy."

On the way, she had spotted a few people on the floor. They had not fainted from injuries. Most of them were ether-related non-humans who had grown faint from the strange ether disturbance.

...Is that the tingling I felt when we passed over Mikawa's bay?

The ether disturbance caused by the loss of Mikawa was still strong. It had even delayed and slowed down the Musashi.

The shellfire had not let up.

A gravity barrier shattered overhead and shell shrapnel fell on the city with dry metallic sounds.

"Is there any anti-air equipment around here?"

She looked around and spotted two people approaching. Looking back, she saw a pure pair of huge breasts and a wicked pair of huge breasts.

"The shrine maiden and the dancer?"

“Eh? Oh, um, yes, I suppose you could say that.”

“Where are you two going?”

“Heh heh. Long-eared flat girl, do you really not know? Now, tell me the answer!”

“You can ignore that idiot, okay? We’re on our way to the academy. What about you?”

“I was headed to the academy too. I wanted some information and I’d heard your vice president had gone there.”

“Then let’s hurry.”

The shrine maiden pointed forward, so the three of them started jogging.

The shellfire continued and light was shattering in the sky both horizontally and vertically from them. Those fragments illuminated Yoshiyasu as she ran.

“About this shellfire... There’s an enemy fleet pursuing us from behind, isn’t there?”

“Yes, but the enemy is out of time. After all...”

Once the shrine maiden said that, a massive amount of light rose from the earth far beyond the opposite coast and stabbed into the sky.

“...!?”

The light was as bright as midday and it revealed the shape of the landscape.

More than one pillar of light rose toward the heavens. Several dozen of them surged upwards like a reverse waterfall.

“That’s about thirty kilometers away... Is that anti-air fire from Qing-Takeda and Lady Yoshitsune’s heavy mechanical cavalry unit!?”

The shrine maiden explained what was about to happen.

“If we reach that point, the Battle of Mikatagahara begins. Everyone else will be kept out, so what will the Sunomata do? After all,” she said. “I’m sure P.A. Oda will do something about it.”

Toshiie gave a single instruction from the Sunomata's deck.

"Continue firing. Use the cannons more than the ghost ship and continue targeting the opened hull instead of the surface area."

He opened a *lernen figur* and faced forward.

The light rising toward the heavens from far beyond the opposite coast of Mikawa's bay was already vanishing.

But Qing-Takeda's main fighting force was definitely there.

That anti-air fire had been enough to pierce the sky and light up the earth. Toshiie knew perfectly well why they had shown off that firepower.

...They're warning away P.A. Oda for the history recreation of the Battle of Mikatagahara.

"And also warning us about the Battle of Nagashino which begins the fall of the Takeda clan."

Oda's musket unit was supposed to destroy Takeda's cavalry force and P.A. Oda intended to recreate that using the shellfire of an aerial fleet. That was why they had strengthened their aerial forces and used Lake Biwa's stealth dock to its fullest. But...

"It's true Takeda's cavalry soldiers were armed with guns, but turning that into anti-air cannons is quite the interpretation."

Qing-Takeda was not going to go down easily.

Just in case, Toshiie positioned the Sunomata above the Musashi to use it as a shield.

Below, the ocean was coming to an end as they moved from Mikawa to Suruga.

There was land below, more ocean to the right, and...

...Qing-Takeda straight ahead.

Massive bonfires and countless giant figures were visible in the depths of the distant darkness. Those heavy mechanical horse gunners were the history recreation of Takeda's gun-wielding cavalry.

They were definitely intended for the Battle of Nagashino.

“And they’re starting by seeing how I will react.”

Toshiie spoke into his *lernen figur*.

“Qing-Takeda! This is M.H.R.R Treasurer Maeda Toshiie aka Wallenstein representing both P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R.! I am currently pursuing the Musashi in the Sunomata, so cease your attack!”

“He wants us to stop? Who does that kid Maeda think he’s talking to?”

Yoshitsune looked up at the silhouette of the Musashi visible in the western sky.

The right of the Satou Brothers behind her called the Sunomata with a sign frame.

“P.A Oda ship, you are about to interfere in Qing-Takeda’s Far Eastern history recreation. In other words...”

“Satou, send this to Musashi too. ...Oh, and show a little more spirit when you tell him.”

On Yoshitsune’s instructions, the Satou Brothers exchanged a glance and began anew.

“Aiyaahhhhh! P.! A.! Odaaaaaa! Ship! You arrrrrrrrrrrrreeee!
Hiyaahhhhh!”

“You’ll burst a blood vessel if you force yourself.”

The Satou Brothers clearly wanted to say something, but Yoshitsune ignored them and crossed her legs on top of Shizuka’s fuel tank. She then looked low in the sky ahead.

“Hey, Maeda. You’re getting in the way of the history recreation, so get lost.”

She received a response via the Satou Brothers.

“But Lady Yoshitsune...”

“What kind of fool speaks to me without introducing himself?”

“My apologies. I am honored to you would speak with me. I am M.H.R.R. Treas-...”

“I hate long introductions.”

“Then I will send it all to one of your people afterwards.”

“Very good.”

Yoshitsune smiled a little.

“I’ll hear you out since you went along with that,” she said. “Do you want the Musashi that badly?”

Her question received an immediate response.

“No,” he denied. “The Musashi has threatened M.H.R.R.’s history recreation. We wanted to avoid any external influences when M.H.R.R. is in such a complicated situation, but they went against our wishes by traveling through our territory. Therefore,” said Toshiie. “We will punish the Musashi for interfering with the history recreation.”

Toshiie said more from the Sunomata.

“The M.H.R.R. Catholics would like temporary permission to enter Qing-Takeda’s airspace to punish the Musashi. This is to settle the history recreation of Magdeburg, so it has higher priority than the Battle of Mikatagahara.”

“And if I say no?”

“Then...the Testament Union will likely punish Qing-Takeda.”

“I see,” said Yoshitsune with a hand on her chin.

She thought to herself with a nasal “hmm”, and...

“Well, in that case...”

At that point, the Satou Brothers held out a new sign frame from behind her. This one displayed Musashi’s vice president.

“Wait! This is Musashi Vice President Honda Masazumi! I would like to say something concerning that reasoning!”

The night wind washed across a hill.

It was a rough, stormy wind. It heavily shook the tree branches and blew the clouds through the sky.

The clouds covering the night sky had opened, bringing the moon into view and covering the hill in clear light.

Several large ships and countless figures could be seen on the moonlit hill.

They were Hexagone Française's aerial fleet, the Magdeburg transport ship, and their crews.

But another figure stood on the hill's slope some distance away from them all.

It was the Reine des Garous.

She was looking at two *signe cadre* displaying the information Mouri-01 had sent her from Hexagone Française's flagship, the Pension Versailles. The larger one was a map containing the positions of the Hashiba and M.H.R.R Catholic ships in M.H.R.R. or the Seto Inland Sea plus some other predictions.

"This is the predicted distribution of the P.A. Oda aerial forces within P.A. Oda territory. There are a lot of unobservable regions inside P.A. Oda, so we can only predict based on the information gathered elsewhere."

"They really have moved toward Qing-Takeda, haven't they?"

"I would like your opinion. Especially concerning this document sent from K.P.A. Italia."

"Yes."

The Reine des Garous looked to the other *signe cadre* which displayed a document signed by a woman.

"They must be plotting something to send a secret letter only to the Tsirhc Testament Union nations."

With that said, the Reine des Garous looked eastward. She narrowed her eyes into the dark night.

"The Musashi is in trouble."

“You think so too?”

A voice reached her from the top of the hill. She turned around and found Tomoe Gozen standing in the windy grass. The woman’s arms were crossed as she too faced east.

“That idiot Yoshitsune is in trouble too...but this isn’t easy. This is going to demonstrate that siding with the Musashi will make an enemy of someone truly formidable.”

“Testament.”

The Reine des Garous nodded and gave a few instructions while noting how little practice she had typing on a keyboard.

“Mouri-01, I think we will soon need a signed document from Louis Exiv and Mouri Terumoto. There’s somewhere I want to contact in a hurry.”

“Testament. Where is that?”

“Somewhere that used to be your enemy.”

After sending a quick write-up of her plan, the Reine des Garous looked east again.

“I just hope we make it in time!”

Masazumi began her negotiations on the bridge in front of the academy.

Based on what she had heard from the divine transmission relayed by Yoshitsune, Maeda Toshiie was trying to demonstrate his justification for attacking them.

...If I don’t interfere, our position will only grow worse!

Shells dropped, impacts rang out, and countless lights scattered through the sky. They were not up against a large-scale fleet or a large ship, but the Sunomata was using a ghost ship to constantly pursue them.

The attacks themselves were not the biggest problem.

...As long as we’re under attack, Hashiba still has us caught in a state of combat!

Masazumi knew that, as long as this battle continued, the Hashiba forces would continue pursuing the Musashi even if they escaped to Kantou. It would all be in the name of an “unavoidable movement of the battlefield” while punishing them for interfering with Magdeburg’s history recreation.

They could even accuse Musashi of dragging other nations into the battle to assist their escape.

Masazumi needed to avoid that.

After all, Toshiie had claimed Musashi was threatening M.H.R.R.’s history recreation, but...

“Hashiba is trying to blame us for their attack and pursuit! And all while completely disregarding our point of view!”

She could not let them use the history recreation as a shield.

If the history recreation was threatened, all of the Testament Union nations would join M.H.R.R. and Hashiba in opposing them. So...

“I insist you hear me out!”

Chapter 91: Negotiators at the Crossroads

CHAPTER 91

"Negotiators at the Crossroads"



Do you desire chaos?

Or a monopoly?

Point Allocation (Setup)

Do you desire chaos?

Or a monopoly?

Point Allocation (Setup)

An aerial ship continued to evade and attack as it remained above the Musashi, never moving further or closer.

The ship constantly firing homing shells and using the attached ghost ship for speed was the Sunomata, a P.A. Oda high-speed striking ship.

Toshiie thought about his enemy as he stood on the front deck.

“Are you going to cut in, Musashi Vice President?”

...This is the second time.

He had already spoken with her in England once before.

His enemy was located directly below. No, since the Sunomata was in constant motion, he could only say she was somewhere on the Musashi. She was somewhere within the physical blows he fired and they deflected.

Where was she?

If not for the exchange of attacks, he would be able to see her and speak directly to her, yet the attacks were precisely what gave them a chance to exchange words.

“This is very strange, Ma-chan. Distance is meaningless.”

“What a pain.”

Then, the enemy’s voice reached him via Qing-Takeda’s divine transmission network.

“M.H.R.R. Treasurer, I believe the Musashi’s movement within M.H.R.R. never left the categories of ‘firing’ and ‘towing’. We simply traveled in a shallow parabolic arc.”

“It looked to us like a long horizontal course. That is well within the range of interpretation.”

“Precisely,” declared his enemy.

...Is she going to force this through?

As soon as he thought that, the enemy said more.

“Anyway, M.H.R.R. Treasurer, as a representative of Musashi, I, Vice President Honda Masazumi, would like to clear up a misunderstanding M.H.R.R. and the Hashiba forces seem to have.”

Toshiie chose not to play along and ask what that was.

What mattered here was asserting that he was not interested.

But after a pause, Musashi’s vice president resumed speaking.

“In the early morning two days ago, you sent scouts to test our strength, but according to the history recreation, Hashiba and Matsudaira do not become enemies until after Nobunaga’s assassination. For that reason,” said the enemy, “Musashi Ariadust Academy wants it to be known that we have no intention of opposing M.H.R.R.”

“Oh?”

Yoshitsune created a blank space in her mouth.

...Since Maeda’s using the history recreation here, she’s using it against him.

Maeda was using the history recreation to punish Musashi, but Musashi had countered that Hashiba and Matsudaira’s histories contained no battles needing recreating at this point.

Musashi had accepted that their invasion of M.H.R.R. airspace fell within the range of interpretation and then changed the subject. Now, they were using the history recreation as a shield.

...But...

The Satou Brothers spoke up behind her.

“She’s rushing this.”

“If you two can tell, then she’s still got a long way to go.”

Yoshitsune crossed her arms and looked to the sign frame.

“You’re going too far on the offensive to defend yourself. Everyone can tell, Masazumi.”

Masazumi faced forward at the bottom of the stairs.

Light scattered through the sky and sound reached her ears. Instantaneous flashes of light cast her shadow on the stone pavement ahead of her.

This was Remorse Way.

With that name in mind, she filled her lungs with air to cool her body. And...

...How about that?

She had reversed the argument. She knew that was dangerous. Her opponent could grow stubborn and he could also give up on her and reach his conclusion with no further argument.

Was she a coward or was she rushing this due to inexperience?

“———?”

She saw some people up ahead.

That’s two people with large breasts and one with none. No, wait. That’s Asama, Kimi, and Yoshiyasu. And there’s Adele and Mitotsudaira approaching from the left. Including me, that’s four with flat chests and two with large ones. The fraction reduces to 1/2.

...Calm down!!

Don’t distract yourself. I need to think about what the enemy will do here.

“!?”

Light continuously exploded to port which was north and a ship-wide announcement was made.

“P.A. Oda’s Nagahama is pursuing us from behind and port! They are firing! Over.”

Another ship had caught up. And before they began Mikatagahara.

Just as the others stopped their running feet and turned to port, the enemy spoke.

“The Nagahama is an armed trade ship. It has been made quite fast, but its weaponry is light. Still, its toughness is its selling point. It will take time to take it down.”

The intangible pressure weighing down on Masazumi aligned with this visible threat.

“I have command here and I will continue to pursue you at this rate.”

She listened to the enemy.

“So what will you do now, Musashi Vice President?”

“What do you mean?” She raised her eyebrows. “The Musashi has no intention of opposing you!!”

“Then let me say this,” continued the enemy. “I can only conclude that you *do* intend to oppose us.”

Toshiie spoke slowly as he instructed the Nagahama to fly alongside the Sunomata and to continue firing.

“Listen.”

He was speaking more to Yoshitsune than Musashi.

“You invaded our airspace, you actively assisted the Protestants, and you are currently fleeing. How is any of that in accordance with the history recreation? Musashi Vice President, you greatly assisted the Protestants in the Sack of Magdeburg which will determine the course of the Thirty Years’ War between the M.H.R.R. Catholics and Protestants.”

Therefore...

“Not many died in Magdeburg and, even though the city was flooded, the damages were far less than expected. The M.H.R.R. Catholics are requesting an investigation by a representative of the Testament Union.”

He said “listen” once more.

“Depending on that investigation’s findings, it is entirely possible the Sack of Magdeburg could be redone.”

“Impossible!” shouted Mitotsudaira. “The city and its walls were destroyed! Do you have any idea how much preparation would be needed to redo it all!?”

That was exactly right. Masazumi knew this had to be no more than a bluff, but...

...It’s enough to hold off the M.H.R.R. Protestants.

The negotiation was being held over Qing-Takeda’s divine transmission network, so only Toshiie, Masazumi, and Yoshitsune could listen in. Still, they would all be recording it, so even if it was a bluff...

...If I ignore this bluff, he can release the records to make it look like I abandoned the Protestants.

And without Guericke and the Protestants here, she could not check with them what to do about the bluff. She was forced to treat Toshiie’s bluff as legitimate.

“Then what would you have us do?” she asked.

“I would like for Musashi to prove it has no intention of opposing us. ...Oh, I know,” said Toshiie. “If you truly think that we will not be enemies as long as Nobunaga lives, then disarm the Musashi once more and, to ensure you never arm yourselves or begin any more conflicts, I would like to place a Testament Union inspector on the Musashi. One from M.H.R.R., of course.”

That’s not possible, thought Masazumi. *We’re on the way to Kantou to do exactly those things.*

They would gain the strength they needed, work with Europe, and head to Westphalia. That was the entire point of their eastward journey.

...Hashiba knows exactly what we’re doing.

She pretty much knew who would have leaked the contents of that secret meeting in Magdeburg. This meant Toshiie was here now to hold them in check.

But...

“This is...odd.”

The one frowning at Toshiie’s words was Adele.

She walked up to Masazumi’s side and tilted her head.

“...? What does this mean? Hashiba may have joined with the M.H.R.R. Catholics, but why is he assuming the Testament Union will do exactly what they want?”

...Well...

Masazumi thought about that and reached a certain idea.

“Kh.”

It’s hopeless, she thought. *I screwed up*, she added.

...I shouldn’t have used the history recreation as a shield!

A groan worked its way up from the bottom of her gut. She managed to force it back down and opened her mouth to release some words from her stiff throat.

“Have the M.H.R.R. Catholics and Hashiba taken control of the Pope-Chancellor who you could call the representative of the Testament Union!?”

“What? How would they do that?”

Terumoto sat on the tatami mats laid out on the deck of the Pension Versailles, Hexagone Française’s flagship. Louis Exiv was resting his head on her lap.

“That’s impossible, isn’t it!? How would the M.H.R.R. Catholics take control of the Pope-Chancellor!?”

After realizing how loudly she was speaking, Terumoto opened a *signe cadre*.

It was a Shinto version and she typed on the simple keyboard.

Former Delinquent: “The pope is elected by the cardinals, so how did Hashiba do that?”

Still Got It: “But the cardinals themselves can’t do anything. In fact, most of them are missing, given the state of K.P.A. Italia. In that case, who represents

the Catholics? No, who is their defender?”

Former Delinquent: “What? Wouldn’t their defender be the Holy Roman Emperor?”

Still Got It: “Sorry. I’m going to apologize in advance on this one.”

“What?”

Terumoto tilted her head at the Reine des Garous’ post.

...Why is she apologizing to me?

Did she do something? she wondered as she thought about the conversation.

“Wait, the Holy Roman Emperor? Don’t tell me...”

Mouri-01 responded from where she stood to the side.

“Testament. Chancellor Rudolf II held the position.”

It all clicked into place and the man lying in her lap slowly explained.

“Heh. I see. I only heard bits and pieces of that, but I think I get it. After his battle with the Reine des Garous’ daughter, Rudolf II used the Sack of Magdeburg to disappear. Therefore, Student Council President Matthias became the provisional chancellor and thus the provisional Holy Roman Emperor. As the cardinals could not be gathered, he designated the new Pope-Chancellor in their place.”

Exiv gave a quiet laugh.

“They’re placing provisional positions on top of provisional positions to create nothing but fakes.”

“Don’t steal my lines.” Terumoto sighed. “But anyway, that means this isn’t a joke. It’s for real.”

She looked back to a certain *signe cadre* sent from K.P.A. Italia. It informed them of the new provisional Pope-Chancellor and it was signed by a certain individual.

“Olimpia. Historically, she was Pope-Chancellor Innocentius’ older sister-in-law. Currently, I believe she is actually his younger step-sister, but did they place her in the position?”

“Are you comparing her to yourself, Terumoto?”

“I took my position for myself, but I’m not so sure about this woman.”

After grabbing his head and correcting its position, Terumoto pulled the *signe cadre* in close.

“Sleep some more. Don’t force yourself to wake up. We’ll probably be busy starting tomorrow and the Roi Soleil needs to sleep at night. As Mouri of the setting sun, I’ll have things ready by then.”

“Heh. I think you are the one forcing yourself, Terumoto.”

“Not as much as you.”

She let her shoulders droop and looked east.

“Now, what will Musashi do? It’s possible they’ll be forced to do what Hashiba wants.”

“I see.”

Yoshitsune’s eyebrows moved as she thought.

...So Hashiba defeated K.P.A. Italia and set up a puppet in the position of Pope-Chancellor.

She had heard Pope-Chancellor Innocentius was missing, so they must have placed someone else in that spot.

...They’ll probably claim this is only a temporary Pope-Chancellor meant to keep the Testament Union from falling into chaos.

That would probably last until the Peace of Westphalia. Until then, they could still use the “chaos” excuse due to Europe’s Thirty Years’ War.

In that case, thought Yoshitsune with a sigh.

“Satou Brothers, this has taken an annoying turn for politicians like you. And... this is a pretty fatal blow for Musashi. Every last one of the Testament Union’s interpretations is going to benefit Hashiba from now on.”

That of course affected Qing-Takeda as well.

...Trying to make a mockery of us, are you?

The word was out that the Pope-Chancellor was missing, but they had quickly set up a replacement.

...And then there's this Toshiie guy.

He had started negotiating without even hinting at that fact in order to trap Musashi's vice president.

"Satou Brothers, what's going to happen to Musashi at this rate?"

"Testament. They will be placed under the Testament Union's control. After all, they claim to show no hostility and yet they have taken actions that can be 'interpreted' to be hostile. The Testament Union will make sure that they take no more hostile actions. And since Musashi has declared they will preserve the history recreation and that they will not oppose Hashiba they have no reason to reject."

"Yeah, they never would have imagined Hashiba was in a position to control the Testament Union."

If the link between Hashiba and the Testament Union was weak, Musashi could negotiate with the Testament Union and get any inspector kicked out.

But if Hashiba and the Testament Union were close, nothing Musashi said would help.

"They've made a Testament Union you can't negotiate with. That'll definitely hold the other nations in check. But they're asking for inspections and disarmament, huh? That's no different from what the Testament Union did in the past. Pathetic."

Yoshitsune smiled bitterly, but...

"Then I guess we need to get moving, Satou Brothers. Let's go take control of Maeda's plan. And..."

She corrected her posture.

"Tell all of our men to stay carefree as we do this."

Masazumi tried to speak.

...What do I do?

To keep Toshiie away, she had said they had taken no hostile action against M.H.R.R. and Hashiba.

And she had claimed they would not oppose Hashiba because of the history recreation.

But...

...He refuses to believe our intentions.

So he was asking them to convince him by taking on an inspector and disarming.

However, the inspections and disarmament would be carried out by the Hashiba-led Testament Union. If they accepted, there would be no compromise or reduction.

Musashi's power and freedom would be suppressed by Hashiba.

She could not allow that.

After all, they were on their way to Kantou in order to gain more power.

"I see."

As everyone watched her and shells landed on the port side, Masazumi spoke quietly.

"I understand one thing now."

"What might that be?"

She nodded and answered him.

"Our negotiations have broken down."

"Eh?"

Masazumi heard confused voices around her, but she shook her head.

...I screwed up at the very beginning.

To avoid Hashiba's pursuit, she had tried to demonstrate their lack of hostility toward Hashiba.

That had been wrong.

Hashiba was trying to crush them, so they had taken advantage of that.

...No, they were trying to trap me like that from the beginning.

And they had gotten her.

Given the urgency of the situation, she had leaped at the enemy's bait.

She should have behaved differently. Instead of only trying to escape the current situation, she should have fought them head on. So...

"These negotiations have broken down."

"This will leave a blemish on your record."

"As long as it's only on my record. I lost here. You can rejoice."

This was far better than having them take control of the Musashi due to her mistake.

And with that in mind, there was something she had to say.

...You are our enemy.

That was why she would reject their inspector and their disarmament.

...But...

That would truly mean making an enemy of Hashiba. Nobunaga had not yet been lost, so she would be ignoring the history recreation. It was her own mistake that had led to this, but...

...Can I?

Could she declare their hostile intentions toward Hashiba?

Could she really reject the history recreation and make an enemy of the Testament Union?

"———"

She closed her eyes and breathed in.

“Okay.”

She had built up her resolve.

Everyone was looking her way and she knew what she had to ask them.

“Is it possible to lose the Sunomata and Nagahama here?”

If they brought a Hashiba force with them to Kantou, Matsudaira would be neither a protector nor a barrier for the cautious Kantou forces. That meant they had to shake off those two ships here.

“It wouldn’t be impossible.”

Neshinbara walked up from the road on the right.

He then turned to look toward the bow where two people were walking down Remorse Way.

“Aoi and Horizon?”

“Hey, I don’t know what’s going on, but it sure is exciting. Can’t you do something about those noisy guys flying above us?”

Don’t sound so carefree, thought Masazumi, but she was pretty sure all would truly be lost if he was ever anything but carefree. So she turned to Neshinbara who nodded.

“We can use Ariadust-kun’s Logismoí Óplo on the Nagahama and Asama-kun’s arrows on the Sunomata. That just leaves how we fly. The Sunomata is staying in motion so we can’t aim at it and the Nagahama is keeping its distance. The Musashi will have to be prepared to run into them a little.”

“Heh heh. You can only choose to be so rough because you know you can fix everything at Kantou IZUMO later. Choosing to put up with some pain now for what comes later is an important decision for a girl, you know?”

“I suppose,” agreed Masazumi.

But then...

“You can’t,” cut in the idiot. “Seijun, what are you freaking out about?”

He hit the bull's-eye.

...I can't believe him.

Not only because of how well he observed people but also because he had no reservations about saying it.

He's pretty dangerous even as an ally, thought Masazumi with a bitter smile in her heart.

Still, she gave a large tilt of her head.

“What? Me? Freaking out? What are you talking about?”

I really am bad at lying, she realized.

The others were watching her and the situation was still underway.

The Musashi was already flying above the ground and about to enter Qing-Takeda.

She needed to make a decision in order to maintain Qing-Takeda's trust.

...I need to say we're their enemy.

They would ignore the history recreation and oppose Hashiba. Then, they had to enter Kantou after losing the Sunomata and Nagahama.

Of course, if they created a hostile situation with Hashiba and then went to Kantou, the Kantou forces would accuse them of bringing trouble with them, but she could bear that responsibility alone. So she hurriedly spoke up.

“Look at the situation here. We need to break out of this, so...”

“I said you can't.”

Aoi stepped in front of her and said “listen”. He then pulled the pads out from his chest.

“Put these in for a sec.”

Silence reigned for about three seconds. Afterwards, Masazumi quietly breathed in and glared at the idiot.

“What are you trying to say?”

“What?”

The idiot tilted his head and held the objects out toward her again with an entirely serious expression.

“It only has to be for a sec, okay? Just a quick sec, okay?”

“I’m serious. What are you trying to say, you idiot?”

As soon as she said that, he removed his wig and placed it over her head without bothering to turn it around.

The back of the long hair hid her face entirely.

“Ah.”

Surprised, she saw golden locks swaying in front of her. She frantically reached up, but found it was a tight fit. It latched onto her real hair and would not come off easily. But...

“Hey, anteater, are you sending that divine transmission to Yoshitsune? I saw her a moment ago.”

“Maa.”

“What is it, you fool? Do you need something?”

“Hey, that you, Yoshitsune?”

“Stop that,” muttered Masazumi, but the idiot grabbed her head and pushed her away from the sign frame.

He then completely ignored her as he spoke.

“Can you hear this, Yoshitsune? We’ll have to wait until later to play with my dick. I’m cross-dressing right now.”

“What the hell are you trying to say!?”

“L-Lady Yoshitsune! Tolerance! You need to demonstrate tolerance!” shouted the Satou Brothers.

“I don’t envy your job, you two. ...Now, Yoshitsune, can you see this right here? It’s not my dick, so actually look, okay? This girl’s a blonde, right? That’s

because she isn't Seijun."

"...What?"

Masazumi wanted to protest, but the idiot said more to Yoshitsune before she could.

"Some idiot disguised herself to trick you. That's gotta be what happened. After all..."

After all...

"Our vice president always grins like an idiot when she negotiates. Whenever things seem so bad you don't think anyone could enjoy it, she's got the most satisfied look you've ever seen. So..."

So...

"If this girl can't do that, she's clearly not Seijun. You saw me reveal her disguise, didn't you?"

"Wait, Aoi!"

What was he doing? How was he planning to do this?

...How is he planning to escape my mistake here!?

"Yoshitsune," said the idiot. "Shoot everyone, even us."

Yoshitsune clearly heard what the idiot said.

"I heard a bit about that Battle of Mikatagahara stuff earlier. We get beat up pretty bad in that, right? So...that's the normal outcome here. I dunno what'll happen to the Musashi and I do know Seijun was doing everything she could to avoid it, but..."

But...

"That means not avoiding it is just the normal outcome. So..."

Outside the frame, the idiot shook the hand holding Masazumi's head. He seemed to be sending strength to her.

"So shoot us, Yoshitsune! We'll do something about it, so don't worry about

us!”

“Waaaaait!”

The new shout came from Toshiie.

“Are you going to drag us into this, too!? That is an undeniably hostile act!”

“Eh? What’re you talking about? Hashiba and Matsudaira are best buddies right now, aren’t we? But I was thinking. We keep saying how good friends we are to you, but you keep saying we’re not. I’m finding that a little hard to believe, so how about we test our power of friendship?”

The idiot scratched his head as he continued.

“You’ll stay by our side and get shot up during the Battle of Mikatagahara, won’t you?”

“Waaaaait!”

“Matsuuu!”

Oh, Ma-chan made a joke! noted Toshiie in a corner of his mind.^[4]

...This is insane!

He was saying he could not trust Musashi’s claims of non-hostility, so now they wanted to test their friendship in the same way. And...

“Why do we have to join you in the Battle of Mikatagahara!?”

“Hey, Shiro!”

“What?”

Toshiie tilted his head at the unexpected name and the idiot looked to the left of the screen.

“Shiro, this guy’s a mercenary, so let’s hire him. We’ll buy his friendship and then use him as a shield as much as we can. Isn’t that a great plan?”

“Wait, are you a complete moron!? What are you talking about!?”

Toshiie nodded several times at what the merchant shouted from out of frame. That plan was simply ridiculous.

Musashi's treasurer stepped in from the left of the screen. The tall boy gave Toshiie an expressionless look before turning back to the idiot.

"Listen, idiot. Listen very carefully. I cannot believe you would suggest we buy friendship."

Yes! That's right! It's wrong, isn't it!?

"That trash is not worth a single yen."

"Ehhhhhhh!?" shouted Toshiie.

"Could you quit taking my shtick in an entirely different direction like that?"

Ignoring the idiot's head tilt and complaint, the merchant faced Toshiie once more.

"Now then, M.H.R.R. Treasurer. Friendship is a form of free service. Did you hear that? Free. It comes with no future obligations, so it allows you to rip someone off without giving them any way to track you down! ...On that note, go die for us and do it for free."

"Wait, wait, wait!!"

Something had gone wrong at some point and a certain thought came to mind. He was pursuing the Musashi because they had violated the history recreation, so...

...Our history recreation takes priority over Mikatagahara since that battle hasn't even started yet!

That meant they could not begin that battle.

...It comes after us.

He had tried to use that reasoning to ignore what they said, but then he heard a sudden voice.

It was the idiot again.

"Hey, Maeda whatever-your-name-is? Yeah, you in the red. You're about to enter Qing-Takeda."

The boy asked a single question.

“But did you get Yoshitsune’s permission?”

Toshiie sucked in an icy gasp.

...Oh, no!

When entering Qing-Takeda he had meant to first get permission by stating his need to punish Musashi, but as Yoshitsune pointed out...

“I’ve heard a lot here, but I haven’t actually given permission yet.”

...They got me...

Normally, he would have gotten permission from Yoshitsune at the beginning of the discussion.

In fact, he had started the discussion toward that end.

But as he was negotiating for that permission, someone had interrupted.

“Musashi Vice President!!”

Masazumi was hanging her head with the wig forced on her head by the idiot, but the discussion over the sign frame made her realize what she had done.

...Thank goodness.

Interrupting at that crucial point had been an elementary trick, but it had paid off.

Preventing Yoshitsune and Toshiie’s discussion from continuing had been fortunate in and of itself, but...

...Can I really be proud of drawing Maeda’s attention to me?

Suddenly, the hand shaking her head lifted her head instead.

“I don’t really get it.”

The idiot tilted his head and asked a question.

“But can you smile now?”

“I’m a fake, aren’t I?”

That was all they had accomplished, so Masazumi let her shoulders droop again.

...From here on, the harsh results are going to be forced onto both of us equally!

Toshiie looked at the course Matsu displayed on a map.

They were about a minute away from Qing-Takeda territory and the anti-air cannons there.

Even if they were punishing someone for violating the history recreation, the Sunomata would be violating someone's airspace without permission. He could not complain if they fired on him then.

...But if we leave the Musashi, they'll negotiate a peaceful resolution to the Battle of Mikatagahara.

The Musashi would not be damaged and would slip from his fingers.

"Okay."

Toshiie made up his mind.

He opened his mouth as he looked to Yoshitsune and the idiot visible on the *lernen figur*.

"I am sure you already understand this, but I will say it anyway."

He spoke to Qing-Takeda.

"My ship and its partner ship are pursuing the Musashi on the orders of the Testament Union. Any hindrance to our mission will be deemed a hindrance to the Testament Union and the history recreation, so you will be deemed an enemy. And if you are deemed an enemy of the Testament Union..."

I'm essentially making a gamble without thinking of the consequences, he thought as he continued.

"The Testament Union will conquer your academy's territory, disarm you, and set up a provisional rule."

“That is an abuse of power! Are you trying to use the Testament Union’s name to conquer the world!?”

Yoshitsune heard one of the Satou Brothers shouting, but she lightly raised her right hand and waved backwards.

“Don’t worry about it. He probably thinks that’s actually a threat. Even if he did conquer the world, he’s probably only got about fifty years of life left.”

But...

...Honestly. He thinks forcing troubles onto us counts as a threat.

If they tried to protect Musashi, the Testament Union would attack Qing-Takeda.

Qing-Takeda was a powerful nation, but she doubted it would last if it made an enemy of every Testament Union nation plus P.A. Oda.

The real problem was what happened after it was destroyed.

...So P.A. Oda would set up a provisional rule in Qing-Takeda’s territory, would it?

The ruler that had protected Kantou from P.A. Oda would have destroyed itself protecting Musashi and also summoned P.A. Oda into Kantou.

That was why Maeda was asking her to compromise with him. He wanted her to allow his pursuit of the Musashi.

“Don’t take me so lightly.”

As long as she did not protect Musashi, Takeda would not be destroyed and Takeda land would not be placed under the Testament Union’s provisional rule.

Most of the Kantou and Tohoku academies would want that. Most of them, including the Date clan, were struggling for supremacy and would want to avoid allowing the future rulers of Matsudaira into Kantou.

What was she supposed to choose as the empress who ruled over most of Kantou?

“I see.”

Interesting, she thought.

Musashi was certainly interesting, but so was their enemy, Hashiba. It took some guts to use the situation in Qing-Takeda as a bargaining chip. So...

“Maeda, I think I’m going to play along with your little threat there.”

“Then will you allow us to pursue the Musashi in accordance with the Testament Union’s orders?”

Yoshitsune gave a smile that did not reach her eyes.

“Why would I do that? I don’t give a damn about the Testament Union or P.A. Oda.”

“Eh!? So Yoshitsune really is on my side!? Is it because I put it on her head!? Does that mean-gfh!”

The idiot was sent rolling along the ground by a short hook to the side from Horizon.

Everyone shrieked and backed away, but Horizon asked Masazumi something with the light of cannon fire washing over her.

“What is the meaning of this, Masazumi-sama? Did she really fall for him because he placed his penis on her head? Is such a frightening thing really possible?”

“That’s how you want to start this discussion!?”

“Calm down, calm down.”

Horizon held out her hands and faced Masazumi who had parted the wig’s hair to either side.

“Masazumi-sama, we can assume Yoshitsune-sama’s decision was the best possible decision for the Kantou nations, correct?”

“Most likely. She definitely chose the course of history that would give people the least to accuse her of.”

“Really?” asked Asama as she looked back and forth between Horizon and Masazumi. “If she lets the Musashi through, won’t the Testament Union and P.A. Oda set up a provisional rule in Qing-Takeda? Isn’t that the worst possible

outcome for the Kantou nations?”

“There’s a way of preventing that. She can protect the Musashi and let us through to Kantou while also preventing the Testament Union and P.A. Oda from setting up a provisional rule in Kantou. Of course, it’s going to force a pretty heavy burden on us.”

Just as Masazumi was preparing to explain, Yoshitsune’s voice reached her from the sign frame.

“Maeda Toshiie, I will allow you to pass through Qing-Takeda territory on one condition: become our mercenary.”

And...

“I grant you the right to carry out the Battle of Mikatagahara. Your employment lasts until...well, since Matsudaira lost their headquarters at Mikawa, let’s say it lasts until they reach their next headquarters. The two of you will carry out the Battle of Mikatagahara until then. The Testament Union can judge Musashi based on how well they complete this. You can see here whether they intend to uphold the history recreation or not. ...And since the Testament Union vows to strictly uphold the history recreation, you don’t have any reason to refuse, do you?”

Silver Wolf: “So we have to fight the Battle of Mikatagahara until the Musashi arrives in Edo!?”

Gold Mar: “Um, but what happens with Ga-chan’s death as Naruse Masayoshi?”

Mal-Ga: “Margot, are you worried about-... Crap, I imagined it for a second and got a bloody nose!”

Worshipper: “Is it just me or are you getting more and more fast-paced, Naruze-kun?”

“Anyway,” typed in Neshinbara.

Novice: “This actually helps us a lot with the history recreation of Naruse Masayoshi. After all, Lady Yoshitsune has hired Maeda as a mercenary for their

side of the history recreation.”

Do you understand?

Novice: “There’s no way the Sunomata alone can pursue the Matsudaira clan as Mikatagahara requires. Since Maeda is accusing the Musashi of interfering with the history recreation, Lady Yoshitsune is making him fail to recreate Mikatagahara properly so he too can be accused of failing in the history recreation.”

Smoking Girl: “That means we win if we reach Edo, right? Naruze, don’t get so excited you go flying ahead of us.”

Mal-Ga: “I know that. How rude. I just have to stay put and draw up some storyboards, right?”

Flat Vassal: “I’m not sure I like the sound of that either.”

That was when the Musashi passed by the cannons on the ground below.

They all used sign frames to check the footage recorded by the bottom of the ships.

“Ah,” said Asama. “The Qing-Takeda people are waving toward us.”

Yoshitsune looked up at the massive form passing by overhead.

She had no intention of waving. A ruler did not see people off. So instead...

“Satou Brothers, wave to them.”

That was all she said before facing west again.

Maeda was dutiful. He had stopped firing on the Musashi and would only begin again after passing by.

The sign frame footage was still coming in even as the Musashi and Sunomata grew more distant. Musashi’s vice president and Maeda must have both known what was about to happen.

“What are those stiff looks for?”

They did not respond. A slight period of silence was all that followed.

And that was why Yoshitsune opened her mouth as the fires and sign frame illuminated her below the darkness and rumbling of the Musashi's passage.

"That ends my role as Takeda Shingen."

Shingen died of illness during the Battle of Mikatagahara, so...

"Now that Mikatagahara has started, I've lost my right to command. And..."

She narrowed her eyes to stare far into the western sky. She could see something like dark clouds slowly approaching in the dark sky. When she saw them, the corner of her mouth rose in a smile.

"Maeda, if I'd shot you down, you would've attacked me with the P.A. Oda fleet waiting behind you and with Kuki's ships that survived the battle with Matsunaga, isn't that right?"

She looked at Toshiie on the screen and spoke to his stiff expression while maintaining her own smile that did not reach her eyes.

"But Maeda."

"What?"

Yes.

"I'm guessing you had already decided what to do if I set up Mikatagahara like this. Now, what history recreation are you planning to begin with the fleet you brought?"

"What history recreation do you think we might be planning?"

Don't pretend you don't know, she thought with a smile. After all, the distant fleet was growing larger even now.

It looked like the entirety of P.A. Oda's existing Ottoman fleet had to have been mobilized.

Some ships were large and some were small, but they were all old models. They wanted to attack with all of their forces from the Lepanto or earlier, just like Tres España had.

What was worth going that far?

"I'll take you on. This is the decisive battle between Oda and Takeda that

began after Shingen's death. This begins the fall of the Takeda clan."

The time had finally come.

"Yes, this is the Battle of Nagashino."

Masazumi heard Yoshitsune's determination over the divine transmission.

"Listen." Yoshitsune raised her eyebrows in a smile while looking to the left, toward Maeda's sign frame. "Hashiba, Maeda. You've lost this confrontation and I've won. You prepared your strategy, set up your tricks, and tried to steal this nation I've made. But I'm just going to obey the history recreation and let this Qing-Takeda land follow the course of history."

At that point, she turned toward Masazumi.

"Masazumi."

She said "listen" again.

Then, her smile deepened as she looked up toward the Musashi in the sky.

"Do you know what happens to Takeda territory after the fall of Takeda? The land and the remnants of Takeda all eventually end up under Matsudaira's rule. That might not be possible yet, but there are two ways I can support you now, fools of Musashi."

One.

"Go east and grow strong. If you can do that, it will be our strength too."

And two.

"Finishing Nagashino will be a large step forward in the history recreation concerning Nobunaga. I can more or less guess what you're trying to do, so this should help you a lot."

She said "listen" yet again.

"Heaven and earth belong to the gods. While the clever tricks of men might steal what belongs to a seemingly divine ruler, the world belongs to that ruler. As a ruler, I will not be swayed by anything you do. You can live however you like and advance the current age however you like. So let me say one thing, fools of

Musashi.”

That being...

“While I will not be swayed by anyone, I will give this age to you, Musashi.”

...Is she telling us to advance the age?

She had called them Musashi instead of the Far East or anyone’s name in particular. Masazumi carved that into her heart and saw Yoshitsune looking up on the sign frame. She was looking up at the Musashi.

And suddenly, she looked to the idiot standing next to Masazumi.

Her mouth spread in a smile.

“Live a free life like I do. That’s the one lesson I have for the one who called my name, nudist.”

“Well... I’m a little more into cross-dressing than nudism right now.”

“You damn fool.”

After a single bitter laugh, the sign frame vanished.

As if to say a ruler did not see anyone off, she had ended the divine transmission.

The sudden parting left everyone speechless and motionless.

“———”

In that instant of silence, the Musashi began to shake.

“...!?”

It was not an attack from outside and it was not due to acceleration. The shaking was coming from within.

“Emergency! Saboteurs are destroying the interior of the ships! There are seven in all!”

The warning was from “Musashi” and everyone remembered the number she mentioned.

“The seven are from Sanada Academy! They are fleeing while destroying the interior of the ships! Over.”

“Given how much pressure they’re under every day, I guess it isn’t surprising Sanada got to work so fast. They need to teach those complacent kids that this is the age of the warring states.”

Smoke rose from the Musashi as it was pursued by the Sunomata and Nagahama in the eastern sky.

The Sanada forces on board had sabotaged it.

...After Takeda’s fall, Sanada joins Hashiba.

They were a small power, but they were still useful as a watchful eye on Kantou, as messengers, and as guards. Here, they had gone ahead and started fulfilling their role.

“But they sure are naïve. They were given a place to stay and this is how they repay Musashi? They might as well be telling them not to hold back next time they see each other.”

They were useless.

“They’re supposed to be ninja, but they don’t put any emotion into their plans and end up starting an attack they can’t complete. That would be why everyone calls you ‘unneeded’.”

As she spoke, she heard another explosion and the Musashi grew more distant.

The eight giant ships grew smaller in the east as they received a variety of damage.

But Yoshitsune moved them from her gaze to look to the western sky.

A massive fleet was coming her way.

“Satou Brothers, you two take command.”

“Testament. But what about you!?”

“With Nagashino beginning, I can’t take command. Command goes to the next generation, so Katsuyori’s name will go to...”

The Satou Brothers both nodded.

“Due to your emergency retirement as Shingen, we split the name between the two of us. We have already begun dealing with everything from the rebellion of the Kokujin to Takeda’s destruction.”

“That’s a lot of responsibility. Make sure to lament that we have to recreate Nagashino. And as for Katsuyori’s suicide, try to use the split name inheritance so you only have to beat each other half to death. Also...”

Yoshitsune looked up at the Benkei, the large floating city in the east. The sight devices on its bow glowed and turned their red light her way.

“Just like old times, do whatever you want.”

Chapter 92: Condemner in a Place of Parting

CHAPTER 92

"Condemner in a Place of Parting"



Now
Where is there a nice breeze?
Point Allocation (An Elevated Place)

Now

Where is there a nice breeze?

Point Allocation (An Elevated Place)

To the west of the Musashi, several beams of light flew even further into the west.

Two people were rushing toward the stern of Musahino's surface area as if to see those lights off. One wore a Qing-Takeda coat as a vest and the other wore a Qing-Takeda girl's uniform and a skirt.

"Hurry up!"

"Sure thing, Saizou. What about the others?"

To answer him, five sign frames appeared next to his face. The covert sign frames produced no light and drew their images with shadow. One of those shadow-drawn people was a woman with heavy makeup and a metal fan sword resting on her shoulder.

"#7, Riichi. I'm on my way there. I found a safe spot on the outer edge, so I can jump down at any time."

A demonic giant priest shrugged in the next sign frame over. He scratched his cheek with a bitter smile.

"#3, Miyoshi Seikai. Diving really isn't my thing."

"#4, Isa. And you call yourself a ninja, Seikai? Oh, but I guess it's about time to go home. And I was just getting used to getting three Western meals a day."

After the short girl's comment, a young man with closed eyes spoke from the next sign frame.

"#5, Anayama. Leader Sarutobi, I can meet up with you, but do you need any help?"

"Not from anyone who let the Reine des Garous treat them like a child."

"Understandable." Anayama nodded. "But that would be #10, Kakei, not me."

They all laughed as a slender man shouted “No fair!”

“Anyway, don’t overreach, okay?” said Anayama.

“We won’t. ...Oh, I think this is about far enough for you.”

With that comment, Saizou wrapped her arms around Sasuke’s back.

They jumped into the wind.

The two of them hopped up to the roofs of the surface business district.

Mist trailed after Sasuke as Saizou, a wind spirit, protected him, but he did not actually set foot on the roof. The two of them pulled up their knees and gently flew over the roof. A road came into view diagonally below them.

On that road, two people were rushing sternward, toward Okutama. One was a girl in a lab coat and the other was a man in a work outfit.

Sasuke nodded toward the man’s back.

“There you are, Musashi King.”

Sasuke rode Saizou’s wind silently down to the road.

Musashi King Yoshinao was positioned behind the lab coat girl to protect her, but he did not turn back toward Sasuke. He was too focused on the out-of-breath girl.

Aiming for the man’s neck, Sasuke drew a short sword and rode down on Kirigakure’s wind.

“———”

But a sudden kick flew up toward him from below.

“———!?”

Sasuke did not have time to catch it on the short sword, so he twisted his body around instead.

He held Saizou’s shoulders as she held him from behind and he sank down toward the ground.

He dodged by slipping below the upwards kick.

It all happened in silence.

The kicking foot flew over his lowered head and then leaped quickly into the air.

...Whose attack was that!?

As a ninja, he memorized the movements of every opponent's weapon and body, but this kick was both familiar and unfamiliar. He had seen it before, but it felt somehow off.

So as he moved back and straightened up, he checked who it was from the corner of his eye.

He identified the individual who had leaped without making a noise and landed on a nearby roof.

...The inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name!

Yoshinao continued running while returning his sword to his hip.

...So they got here in time.

Mishina Hiro must have noticed his action because she looked back at him.

"What is it, vice principal? Are you worried about the solitaire game you left running on your PC?"

"No," Yoshinao replied without looking back. "I realized I needed to rethink a number of things after this battle."

"That was a close one. We were so distracted by the sabotage that we left our VIPs unguarded. We need to be more careful."

Sasuke saw the silver-haired girl standing on a rectangular wooden structure in the business district.

By that time, he was already jumping to the next building over, but...

...The Reine des Garous's daughter sure has changed.

Back in IZUMO, she had seemed somehow restless, but...

“She has guts for this not to faze her.”

As soon as he landed on the roof, his comrades surrounded him.

Including him, this was seven of the Sanada Ten Braves.

But the Reine des Garous’s daughter only smiled at him.

“Is this your way of saying goodbye? If so...”

Her own comrades surrounded her: Musashi’s 1st special duty officer, Mary Stuart, the Tachibana couple, the half-dragon 2nd special duty officer, and an Indian holding a pot of curry.

The last one was a bit of an enigma, but he was probably some kind of secret weapon. A secret ingredient was an important part of curry, after all. Those not here were presumably protecting the other VIPs, but...

“Thank for your hospitality.”

The half-dragon replied with a nod.

“Noriki will be disappointed. You helped him repair the ships quite a bit. ...Of course, then you destroyed all that.”

“Yes,” agreed Tachibana Muneshige while looking to Miyoshi Seikai.

“Nyuudou, you played with the children a lot, so this is a difficult situation.”

“I also wish that could have lasted longer, but...”

“Sorry.” Saizou removed herself from Sasuke’s back and smiled bitterly. “We have to do our duty, so the next time we meet, we’ll be enemies from the start. I don’t want to hear any complaints if we kill you without warning, okay?”

“I don’t think they can complain if they’re dead.”

“Pipe down, you.”

Mary smiled at Saizou’s comment and then bowed their way.

“Take care.”

As soon she said that, Musashi’s 1st special duty officer launched an attack.

He threw Ex. Collbrande as a projectile.

The goodbyes were over, so they would always face each other as enemies from here on out. This attack signaled the beginning of that, so Sasuke purposefully chose to block it.

He used a shallow strike of his short sword to produce sparks without breaking his weapon.

“See ya.”

He had already leaped into the sky behind him.

He jumped and ran toward the outer edge of the ship.

“Honestly, this is not going to be an easy enemy to deal with.”

He jumped from the deck and into empty air. Sanada territory waited below, west of Kantou.

He spoke to himself as he fell into the dark mountains and to the depths of the forest and valley.

“What am I supposed to tell the young master and our teachers?”

Mitotsudaira sighed and lowered her shoulders.

They had driven off an enemy faction, but another faction was still attacking from the sky.

“Still, one of our enemies has left. We need to make repairs and fight back!”

She understood the situation, so she made instructions through a sign frame.

She checked the course information “Musashi” had sent the student council and chancellor’s officers.

...Currently, the Musashi is heading east while turning a bit north from Suruga Bay.

Instead of traveling along the coast as a provisional border, they were going to head straight to Edo.

...We’re recreating history, so we don’t need to worry about the provisional borders.

They did not have to follow the marker points, so they had an easier time of evading the Nagahama's attacks.

Silver Wolf: "What will we be doing now?"

Novice: "The Battle of Mikatagahara ends when the Matsudaira side loses its pursuers and escapes to its castle, so we need to lose the enemy before reaching Edo and fly into our specialized dock at Kantou IZUMO."

Smoking Girl: "The Musashi's land port at Kantou IZUMO is the floating kind, so we can dock more quickly than when it's on the surface. It'll still be pretty rough, though."

Me: "Um, does anyone need a joke somewhere? Anyone? Please?"

Even through the sign frame, Mitotsudaira could tell everyone was ignoring him, so she did the same.

At any rate, losing the enemy would be easier said than done. The large Nagahama was one thing, but...

"The Sunomata!"

That ship was following them using the ghost ship.

...But we have a way of dealing with that!

First...

"All ships, begin gravitational cruising. Over."

After the ship-wide announcement, ether light reached them from the outer hull.

The expanding components had been left idling so they could use gravitational cruising at a moment's notice. Given the durability of the parts and the remaining fuel, they had to settle this soon.

"Sink the Sunomata before we reach Edo!"

Mitotsudaira's words were accompanied by a great wind blowing across the Musashi.

They had accelerated toward Edo.

Toshiie saw the Musashi move forward.

Due to its great size, it creaked as if shrinking down and then shot forward.

No matter how many times he saw it, it seemed to have the strength of the crashing waves.

But if that great speed was viewed as a wave, then the Sunomata was a small boat riding that wave. Its small size let it ride above the wave without being caught in the middle.

And so it did just that. It was pulled forward by the Musashi, it circled above like a kite, and it borrowed the Musashi's acceleration while looking down on it.

It rode that speed. The Nagahama was left behind as it flew to the north on their left, but the Sunomata only had to attack and force the Musashi to use the power of its gravitational cruising on defense. That would lower the Musashi's speed and allow the Nagahama to catch up.

But something unexpected happened.

The Musashi gained a new color: white.

The color spread from the bow like a flower or sparks.

It was an ocean. The Musashi had created its ocean in front of it in the instant it accelerated.

The water seemed to be set thickly, so a massive amount of spray collided with the air the Musashi was carrying with it and it burst apart in the shape of a spindle. However, the Musashi itself was stopped by the water, erasing its acceleration.

"Oh, no!"

The Sunomata danced.

The ghost ship's speed had dropped in response to the Musashi's actions, but the same could not be said of the Sunomata that had the ghost ship attached to the back as a source of thrust. As light as it was, it still had enough weight to

create a tug-of-war between the stopping ghost ship and the coasting Sunomata.

As a result, the Sunomata was pulled back by the ghost ship and pitched forward.

“...!”

It was forced into a midair dance that created a fatal opening.

Asama did not overlook that instant of opportunity.

Below Musashi Ariadust Academy’s bridge, she fired an arrow from the landing partway up the stairs. Her binder skirt was already holding her in place and Kimi was getting in the way by hiding behind her.

“Hit!”

“Clap!!”

She had cast several ghost purification spells on the arrow and provided no homing reinforcements to focus on acceleration.

The Sunomata was trying to temporarily purge the ghost ship to stabilize itself, but it was too late.

Asama had abandoned her attack’s homing properties to focus on speed, so it transformed into a spear of light and scored a direct hit on the ghost ship.

The ship was broken. Its light scattered everywhere and the ghosts ascended toward heaven as glowing mist, but...

“Please!!”

A moment later, the ocean in front of Musashi’s bow vanished.

Immediate reacceleration was launched backwards from the opened portions on the ships’ side hulls. The Musashi almost seemed to have grown wings as the most acceleration light that day was blasted into the sky to send them away from the Sunomata.

“...!!”

The Musashi used everything it had built up to push itself forward, and...

“———!!”

After passing a certain point, the eight ships raced forward.

The Musashi poured on speed as it flew alone to the east.

White mist exploded and trailed from every corner and point as the Musashi continued onward. It seemed to bend in agony as it slipped through the wind and dropped far down in the sky to pick up even more speed.

The Nagahama could not keep up and neither could the Sunomata now that it had lost the ghost ship. The Musashi simply headed east, leaving behind the roar of the air it broke through and split apart.

Qing-Takeda’s warriors looked up at that roar as they began exchanging fire with the enemy fleet arriving overhead.

“So they’ve gone.”

Yoshitsune had finished riding Shizuka up to Benkei’s lowered shoulder and she watched the leaving ship through the descending noise, scattering flames, and shrapnel.

...Okay, what to do now?

The Battle of Nagashino had already begun.

Takeda’s heavy mechanical horse cannons were exchanging artillery fire with P.A. Oda’s aerial fleet.

She was surrounded by light and noise. The fleet overhead was large enough to hit without really aiming and they sent a downpour of shells back their way.

Gravity barriers, defense barriers, personal barriers, large barriers, and countless other defensive spells scattered light as the exchange of cannon fire pierced up and down through the night sky.

But despite the shockwaves, explosions of light, and falling shrapnel, Yoshitsune asked a question.

“I’d like to know what you think, since you’re crazy enough to contact

someone who's supposed to be 'dead'."

She looked to the sign frame "Shizuka" had opened on top of Shizuka's tank.

"Your 'sweetheart' is on there, isn't he? You thought you could guide them, but it looks like they rejected you, Houjou Ujinao."

"Qing-Takeda's ruler keeps sticking her nose into other people's business even after she is dead? I can see your nation is going to have an irritating future, Lady Yoshitsune."

"You always have to have the last word, don't you? ...Hey! You over there! Show more care when you shoot those! The Satou Brothers put a lot of work into gathering all the catalyst material for the shells! You're supposed to ignore that fact and fire them completely carelessly!!"

"Are they supposed to show more care or be careless?"

Only kids care about those little details, thought Yoshitsune as she moved Shizuka to the right.

In the spot she had vacated, a five meter square piece of armor dropped down, was knocked back up, and then dropped back down. She watched it fall and saw the Satou Brothers scramble out of the way below.

"Now, what do you want, Houjou? I'm busy being destroyed, so make it quick."

"Testament," replied Ujinao.

The Association of Indian States belonged to the Mlasi religion and was provisionally ruled by the Mughal Empire which belonged to P.A. Oda, so she normally would have used "shaja".

"What's got you using the Testament Union's method? ...Hey! Anti-air unit over there! Don't let any of the ships fly above me!"

"You seem otherwise occupied, so should I wait until later?"

"What? I'll be destroyed before long, so better do it now."

"In that case," said Ujinao as she sent some data over.

It was a map of the ocean near Mikawa and near the Sagami region.

“This is the course predicted by the Fuuma.”

“Oh?”

When she saw the indicated course, Yoshitsune scratched her head and bared her teeth in a smile.

“Ujinao, of all the things you’ve said to me, shown me, and done around me, this is far and away the best! Did Satomi’s chancellor stay on the Musashi because he predicted this!? I can’t believe it...”

Yes.

“I’ve been waiting so long to see the moment the world is set into motion! Well done!”

“Thank you very much. I will tell my subordinates you said so.”

“That’s the problem with you. You need to have more pride in yourself. More like me.”

“You just like to take credit for everything. I heard about the time you were woken up and were crazy enough to say, ‘Good job waking me up. You couldn’t have done it without my help.’ ”

“Honesty is the best policy, so can’t you be more honest with yourself? Life will be pretty boring otherwise.”

“Being honest is not always a good thing. It lets people deceive you again and again.”

“For example?”

Ujinao placed a hand on the side of her mouth and answered the question.

“Topknot.”

“Damn you!!”

The people running around attacking the fleet above looked back and Mobile City Benkei’s sight devices turned their light Yoshitsune’s way, but she waved a hand outward to drive away their gazes.

“So are you saying we’ve already lost?”

“I don’t know how it will happen, but let’s just say this will not be our loss.”

“What has you so confident?”

“Testament,” said the demonic princess with an automaton body. “A loss due to the history recreation and a true loss are two very different things.”

“Agreed. And in that case...”

Yoshitsune crossed her arms behind her head.

“We’ll do whatever we can. C’mon, Benkei, get up. The enemy’s main fleet is here, so let’s show them what we can do.”

Houjou Ujinao sensed it from the roof of the Odawara school building she used as a castle.

With Mt. Hakone to the west, she could not see the battlefield plain, but with her automaton eyes closed, she gathered the visual data sent in from the watchtowers scattered throughout Odawara. What she “saw” like that was the movement of the P.A. Oda fleet as it hung in the sky like dark clouds.

...The fleet is split into three rows to fire in three stages.

The ships of the front row fired in unison and used the recoil to fall back. While those ships loaded their next shells and cleaned the cannons, the next row of ships moved forward and fired.

With two rows, they would have had a firing row and a standby row, but they had three. By the time the front row fired, the second row had nearly finished its preparations, so it could fire almost immediately afterwards.

The barrage itself was bad enough, but that attack had an even more frightening aspect.

...The other side can’t tell when a gap is coming.

The other side was also attacking with cannons, but no matter how powerful those cannons were, they never had a chance to fire when the enemy was firing so constantly.

They might as well have been focused entirely on defense. And...

“The three-stage firing of main cannons is from Nobunaga’s history recreation, so the other nations can’t use it against them.”

Yoshitsune’s unit seemed to be falling back and firing as a countermeasure. The Fuuma ninja unit observing from the peak of Mt. Hakone said Yoshitsune’s heavy cavalry unit was running back to open enough of a gap to negate the enemy’s shellfire.

The enemy had to move forward to pursue them, but moving forward left them unable to fire or at least to fire properly.

In the gap that created, Yoshitsune’s forces would fire their large anti-air cannons.

That had crushed the enemy’s front line and was working on the next line, but the enemy was still numerous and Yoshitsune’s forces were clearly being worn down. The ships that had been modified for higher altitudes were staying in those relatively safe altitudes as they fired.

Qing-Takeda was at a disadvantage.

Yoshitsune had not actually been preparing for the Battle of Nagashino, yet she had agreed to P.A. Oda’s request.

“You wanted to show off your ruler’s pride by protecting the Musashi and keeping Kantou from being conquered,” muttered Ujinao. “But I know the other reason. Mikatagahara is a smaller battle than Nagashino. If you complete Nagashino with the smaller unit you have here, you can leave behind even more forces despite the fall of Takeda.”

She could keep the loss of personnel to a minimum and that personnel would remain in Kantou as an anti-Hashiba force.

The nations protected by Qing-Takeda would not forget that.

“Honestly. And after all that talk about not caring if you lost your people.”

Ujinao clenched her fists as she realized something. If the Musashi traveled through northern Houjou land to Edo and Qing-Takeda was destroyed to the west, Houjou of Odawara would have been protected by both of them.

She made sure to keep that in her heart as she spoke.

“Lady Yoshitsune, you truly were fit to be a ruler. But...”

She could perceive the aerial battlefield, but the ground was harder to “see”.

She continued speaking without looking up at Mt. Hakone’s peak which rose into the night sky.

“But...you are still an idiot.”

As soon as she said that, a massive form rose above Mt. Hakone’s silhouette. The great form was tall enough to reach the fleet in the sky, yet it still looked short.

“That is Qing-Takeda’s striking-style anti-air weapon, Mobile City Benkei!”

The falling shells stabbed into Benkei as he used his backwards motion to stand up.

When standing upright, he was about three kilometers tall and at least two kilometers wide and long.

Gravity barriers opened below his feet to keep him from sinking into the crust.

“Stand!” he shouted.

“Hi there!!”

On his vast shoulder, Yoshitsune raised a hand toward the P.A. Oda fleet that was now at about the same height as her.

A moment later, they fired.

“Ah! You intolerant fools!!”

Benkei’s armor was thick, but that was why almost all of the three-stage firing was aimed at his upright form. Countless armor panels broke and sparks flew, but he finished standing regardless.

“Get! Ready!”

“Face forward, Benkei! Isn’t that big one the Kiyosu!?”

Benkei answered Yoshitsune’s question.

As she rode Shizuka, he appeared in her hand as a warrior monk Mouse and

stared into the distance.

“Correct!”

The Kiyosu was a two kilometer striking ship in charge of the left wing of P.A. Oda’s fleet. It must have sensed danger in Benkei’s focus because it frantically tried to move back as it fired. But...

“Pull them in, Benkei!!”

As soon as Yoshitsune swung her left arm outwards, Benkei’s left arm – the front left fork normally used to keep him afloat – moved unbelievably fast.

It was controlled using Qing-Takeda’s Oat. This was an application of Oat’s thousand *li* travel spell.

The spell was said to let someone run one thousand *li* in a single night, but a great number of the spells were used to send the giant armored doll’s left arm forward.

Several circular emblems appeared on the outside of the arm. Instead of using internal motors, spells on the outside moved the giant arm around. The arm groaned under the strain, but...

“...! ...! ...!”

The two kilometer arm flew rapidly through a space of less than one thousand *li*.

The movement did not hit a single enemy ship. It missed, but the arm’s speed instantly broke the sound barrier.

“We’ve got you now, you fools!!”

An overwhelming amount of air was pushed out of the way and a vacuum was created in front of the P.A. Oda fleet. It initially struck the fleet as a shockwave, but then a pocket of air started to fill the vacuum.

“Pull them in close. Try not to make it too painful for them.”

An explosion of wind and a long trail of white water vapor appeared and the enemy fleet’s front line literally fell into them.

The small and even midsized ships were pulled into a gap or drop in the air.

A few of the ships collided and even the Kiyosu was sucked in as it tried to move away.

After judging the Kiyosu's movement and distance, Yoshitsune swung her right hand from atop Shizuka and raised an over-the-top voice.

“Go for a punch☆, Benkei!!”

“Punch☆!”

Copying her movement, Benkei made a horizontal chop with an over-the-top movement.

With a gravity barrier knuckle guard attached, the metal blow drew an arc with a two kilometer radius.

The small ships were mowed down, the midsize ships were knocked away, and...

“Direct hit!!”

The Kiyosu was struck.

“Hit!”

A splendid sound of impact rang out.

A great noise and an intense noise blended together to send a single tremor through the sky.

The ships whose armor had been torn away during the battle were blown away by the shockwave and Benkei's surface was also blown away like stains on its paint.

A moment later, the Kiyosu was destroyed as if it had been hit by all the forces built up inside it.

The front half was compressed to a third of its size from left to right and the entire ship tilted.

“Hey, support that thing.”

“Support!”

Benkei reached out both arms and supported the tilting ship. The crew cried out and jumped off, but Yoshitsune still pointed to the left and spoke.

“Go for another hit.”

Benkei responded by swinging the Kiyosu like a baseball bat.

He targeted the right side of the enemy fleet. They were still dancing about from being sucked in and then hit by the second vacuum created by the horizontal chop, so Benkei got a clean hit with the Kiyosu.

After innumerable sounds of destruction, the Kiyosu bent and the enemy fleet broke and scattered, especially the small ships.

“Strike!”

“That was really more of a hit.”

“Don’t! Worry! About! It!”

As the wind blew in after the fact, Benkei’s Mouse tilted his head and Shizuka’s Mouse stroked his head. After seeing that, Yoshitsune faced forward.

The enemy’s left wing had been crushed, but...

“There’s still more?”

The enemy fleet was still plenty thick, so...

“Let’s go, Benkei.”

“Let’s! Go!”

As soon as Benkei took a large step forward, their surroundings grew dark.

It was night, and yet darkness suddenly surrounded Yoshitsune.

“...!?”

The only light was her own sign frame and Benkei’s glowing sight devices.

...The fleet around us has vanished!?

No, she realized. They haven’t vanished.

“We just can’t see them!?”

She suddenly realized there was no noise either. Only one thing surrounded them.

...Dark clouds!?

Something swirled around her with occasional lightning racing along its surface.

The wind blew in.

“What is this?”

She did not know, so the corner of her mouth naturally rose.

“Interesting!”

She had no idea what had happened, but she knew what was here. The surrounding dark clouds were growing thicker and the wind wrapped forcefully around her.

“...! ...! ...!”

Benkei’s entire body shook. He corrected his posture and took a defensive stance while Yoshitsune sensed a presence around her.

...This was earlier than expected, but there’s no helping that!

“Listen!”

She sent out her words.

“Listen, fools of Musashi!”

As the Musashi accelerated, Masazumi listened to the staticky voice coming from a sign frame.

“Head north! Make allies of Date and Sviet Rus!”

And...

“Masazumi! I don’t know if this has anything to do with the Princess Disappearances, but there is one thing I can tell you.”

“...What!?”

“Won’t you answer me!?”

She had, but it did not seem to have reached her. Even so, Yoshitsune sent out her words.

“The Princess presumably belongs to some kind of organization, so let’s assume that organization is an academy. But I’ve never heard of an academy with someone known as the Princess. However...”

However...

“When the people descended to this planet long ago, they decided how they would keep the world moving. The old stories say the leaders gathered and created an ‘academy’ to guide the people. That must have been the beginning of the modern academies. And after the world was split between the real world and the harmonic world, the Emperor built academies across the Far East as places of guidance. Those academies no longer exist, but I do know what they were called.”

That being...

“The Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies. I believe they were the locations of rituals meant to pray to the environmental gods for rain in the harsh environment of early history. I’ve never seen one of them, but rumor has it they existed up to the Harmonic Unification War.”

Yoshitsune continued.

“Go there. It may have nothing to do with the Princess, but if you’re searching out some hidden group, then searching out a hidden organization wouldn’t be a bad way to start. The lands up north have existed for a long time and the imperial army conquered the non-humans there in the past. There must have been a place of guidance there. I had no interest in it, but there must be traces of the past there.”

So go.

“Go children of Musashi Ariadust Academy, the newest of the Far Eastern academies. Challenge this oldest of academies and-...”

The divine transmission was cut off by static and Masazumi shouted a single

name.

“Lady Yoshitsune!”

Yoshitsune thought she heard someone calling her name, but she was already preparing to fight.

She felt a power straight ahead in the darkness surrounding her. She sensed something approaching, so...

“There, Benkei! That’s it! That’s the enemy that crushed K.P.A. Italia...that crushed Itsukushima!”

She gave a smile of anticipation.

“Go! Benkei Throat Thrust!”

“Throat! ☆! Thrust!”

Benkei stomped forward with a rumbling roar and threw the strike.

As the tremor roared through the sky, something could be heard breaking.

Benkei’s outstretched arm was split into a top and bottom half, gravity barrier knuckle guard and all.

“!?”

...What!?

Benkei had been the one to attack, but something had torn into his arm even more quickly and powerfully.

Just as Yoshitsune wondered what it was, Benkei was sent flying backwards by an impact across his entire body.

...Well, this is simple!

Yoshitsune felt a tremor assault her body from the enemy’s attack. Benkei’s defense system had protected her as his master, protected Shizuka, and even cast defense spells on himself.

“...!”

But Yoshitsune was still sent flying through the air with Shizuka's broken pieces.

Everything on top of Benkei's giant shoulder was knocked into the sky.

She was falling, but she managed to open a sign frame with a trembling hand even as the dark clouds swallowed her up.

Also, Benkei's giant form appeared before her. He intended to protect her from the enemy, but...

"...! ...! ...!"

The giant armored doll's body suddenly exploded.

He had been destroyed.

Benkei broke apart and even the fragments came apart in midair as if being devoured.

"Ha ha!"

Yoshitsune laughed as she fell into the darkness.

"It's been far too long since this world of mine was so interesting!!"

Masazumi looked at the sign frame sitting motionless in front of her.

It was filled with static and shook a little.

"Maa?"

It broke into fragments of light and vanished.

...Ah.

As soon as she realized the divine transmission had been completely cut off on the other end, she heard a distant noise.

Beyond the darkness to the west, she heard a brief but distinct sound of shattering metal.

It almost sounded like something was breaking.

"Lady Yoshitsune..."

She spoke aloud without thinking, and...

“Masazumi! Up ahead!”

Mitotsudaira instantly ran up next to her.

“You can see Edo!”

The beginnings of cheers rose from the Musashi. It was a surge of hopeful doubt from the people moving and working on the surface of the ship. They had seen lights in the form of a bay far to the east.

“...!”

They could not let their guard down yet, but the confirmation of their hopes coming true helped raise everyone’s morale.

Masazumi realized they were all reacting with relief and expectation.

...Honestly.

Did it mean she was a worrier if she was already thinking about what came next? She also had to think about what had happened to Yoshitsune and Matsunaga, but...

...If the vice president starts getting depressed, so will everyone else.

She decided to steel herself for the time being, so she breathed in and corrected her posture.

But then she looked around.

“You...?”

She noticed the tense atmosphere of the others. She distinctly saw it on Asama, Mitotsudaira, Kimi, and the others.

“Ohhhh! Edo! It’s Edo! Akihabara! We’ve gotta go to Akihabara!!”

The idiot aside, no one had relaxed their expression.

Among them, Asama spoke as she looked east.

“Masazumi, I overheard what Lady Yoshitsune told you.”

Masazumi knew more or less what the girl wanted to say, but she asked to help with her own concerns.

“That’s fine. ...Did anything stand out to you?”

“Yes. Why did she...?”

Asama hesitantly tilted her head, so Mitotsudaira nodded to urge her on.

“Right.” Asama faced Masazumi again. “Why did she start by telling us to head north?”

...You wondered that, too?

Masazumi realized she was thinking the same thing as Asama.

They probably all were and Asama looked around seeking confirmation.

“Isn’t that right? Wouldn’t she normally tell us to do that after the Battle of Mikatagahara? And Edo isn’t to the north. It’s to the east.”

Just as she started to ask why again, a sun blossomed above Edo Bay in the east.

It was a dragon line reactor.

It was the light of an explosion.

The ball of light was ten kilometers across. It turned to darkness as if peeling away from within, created a massive empty space, and swallowed up everything.

The air was consumed and erased, causing the sky to move.

The Musashi was heading east toward the Edo region and it was rapidly pulled eastward, but...

“Releasing upper power limits and turning to the north! Over!!”

As they made their forceful turn, all eight ships were thrown northward at full speed. However...

“Some of the accelerators have exceeded their load limit! Over!”

On Tama and Takao's starboard side, the accelerators in the opened outer hull burst. Light scattered and the ships shook, but...

"We have broken away!! Over!!"

The air was thrown about seven hundred meters to the east as the Musashi flew in a sharp arc to accelerate north.

The wind blew in from behind. The air was sucked in to fill the ten kilometer gap, but that air collided as it filled the vacuum and ultimately slammed into the Musashi from behind.

That windy impact struck their stern after they had already finished their turn to the north.

The windows on the stern all shattered, the doors inside were broken, and the contents of the rooms were thrown violently about.

The stern of Takao, Okutama, and Oume hopped upwards.

"Everyone, brace for impact! Over!!"

The vertical movement as it fell back down was greater than fifteen meters.

To prevent an impact with those rearmost ships, the other ships moved forward.

The towing belts were removed so the front five ships and rear three ships could move into intersecting positions.

Okutama very nearly moved past Musashino, but...

"We rode it out! Over!!"

The ships caught up to the wind that had blown past them and they broke through it.

They broke through an explosion of mist and a great noise sounded out.

As the Musashi returned to its normal formation and continued north, the crew realized three things.

First, the great volume of water in Edo Bay had indeed been annihilated.

Second, the Sunomata and Nagahama were still pursuing them, so the Battle

of Mikatagahara was not yet over.

And third, a new form had appeared in the windy sky above Edo Bay behind them. It was...

“The Musashi!?”

A giant ship had appeared there.

After breaking free of a primary stealth space, six linked ships came into view. Overall, it had a triple fuselage structure and it was a quasi-Bahamut class at just below seven kilometers long.

The red and black ship was equipped with cannons and its bow bore the emblem of P.A. Oda and a ship name: Azuchi.

Light raced across the entirety of the massive Azuchi. Some of it was meant to illuminate, some it was decorative, and some of it took the form of pulsing veins of energy, but it all throbbed in waves of bright and dim.

“The Azuchi will now open its outer hull. Shaja.”

After a ship-wide communication, sounds of splitting and of air rushing in accompanied the outer hull sliding apart.

Glowing mist escaped the gap between the outer hull and the inner hull.

That was the light of gravitational accelerators charging up.

The Azuchi began its preparations to head north after the Musashi.

Chapter 93: Traveler in a Sky of No Return

CHAPTER 93

"Traveler in a Sky of No Return"

Where should we go?
Where can we go?
Point Allocation (Flee)

Where should we go?

Where can we go?

Point Allocation (Flee)

Beyond the wind blowing in from the east, Houjou Ujinao sensed a giant ship moving north.

“It bears the name Azuchi, doesn’t it?”

It would technically be Azuchi Castle. That was Oda Nobunaga’s castle on Lake Biwa and it had been the largest castle of the historical warring states period.

While the Musashi represented several cities as “the land of Musashi”, the Azuchi was a single castle.

...Was it built inside the giant stealth space surrounding Lake Biwa?

She knew why it had been brought here and launched a dragon line reactor.

“Did you want a test flight? Now, then.”

Ujinao faced her opponent.

In the magnified visual information she was receiving, several figures stood on the Azuchi’s central bow.

She brightened and further magnified the image.

The P.A. Oda maid automaton in the very back was likely the Azuchi’s captain automaton.

A group of ten and a single individual stood in front of that captain.

Hashiba Toukichirou

“Is that Hashiba and the Ten Spears?”

They were a mix of genders and not all were human, but their most noticeable feature was how young they all were. They already had skilled leaders, so these roles may have been filled with promising younger individuals.

Then there was Hashiba.

“A girl?”

The short girl wore her M.H.R.R. uniform impeccably.

However, she had two noticeable features besides her small build.

First, she had mechanical wings that resembled folded fans.

And second, she wore a hood and the kind of monkey mask used in stage performances.

The monkey-masked girl seemed to breathe in a bit and a wide-area divine transmission was sent out.

“I am M.H.R.R. Vice President Hashiba Toukichirou Hideyoshi of P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R. I am performing a test flight of the P.A. Oda flagship Azuchi as well as assisting M.H.R.R. Treasurer Maeda Toshiie,” she said. “We will be providing support for the Battle of Mikatagahara and performing an early history recreation of the Bunroku Campaign.”

“Impossible!!”

That shout from the stairs in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy came from Satomi Yoshiyasu. She stared into the distance from the stairs, as if looking up at the unseen Azuchi.

“They’re doing Hashiba’s first Korean expedition now!?”

It sounded ridiculous to Satomi Yoshiyasu. The Bunroku Campaign was an expedition to the Korean Peninsula carried out after Hashiba Hideyoshi unified Japan. The invasion had been meant to gain a foothold from which to invade Ming China, so...

...I thought this was going to happen a lot later!

They could only recreate it so early because they could control the Testament Union. And...

“Ah...”

The southern sky grew bright and a great noise supported that brightness.

This was the roar of exploding shellfire.

“———!!”

Yoshiyasu moved on reflex. She ran down the stairs on her way to Righteousness.

“Ohhhh!?”

But a naked idiot ran up the stairs and slammed into her.

Yoshiyasu was almost floating in midair.

Just as she had tried to descend the stairs, the idiot’s face had slammed into her chest from below, pushing her upwards.

The idiot had been trying to ascend the stairs, but his upper body was knocked backwards.

“Oh, no, no, no, no, no!”

They managed not to fall by moving down a single step as a compromise. Yoshiyasu then peeled herself away from the idiot.

“Wh-what do you think you’re doing!?”

But the idiot was not listening. He placed a hand on his forehead and then touched her chest.

“You sure you’re okay being like this?”

She threw a hook at the idiot, so he made a full rotation and rolled down seven more steps.

Allies immediately lined up alongside her and spoke up before the idiot could get back on his feet.

“Why would you say something like that, Toori-kun!? Of course Yoshiyasu-san isn’t okay with being like that! She tried her very best and this was all it got her! This is just who she is, so you have to accept it!”

“Heh heh heh. That’s right, foolish brother. This flat girl has unbelievable talent at being flat!”

...Wait. I’m the one being attacked here, aren’t I? That’s definitely a look of sympathy in their vice president’s eyes. And isn’t anyone going to ask why that idiot is naked all of a sudden?

As she wondered what to do, Yoshiyasu looked to the sky behind her. She saw the Bousou Peninsula burning and returning fire.

“Look! My nation is under attack! I have to go save them!”

“C’mon, Yoshy. What could you do if you went there?”

“You have to ask?” she shouted while turning around.

She found the idiot wearing the blonde wig on his crotch after getting it back from the vice president. Yoshiyasu stared blankly at the scene for a moment, but finally came back to her senses.

“Take this seriously!”

The idiot looked taken aback.

His expression grew serious as he made some quick movements to adjust the blonde wig’s position on his crotch.

“Sorry about that! Is this better!?”

She threw another hook, he rolled some more, and he hopped back up and faced her.

“Y’know,” he began. “If you can make it in time and come back alive, then go. But if not, don’t go.”

“You idiot! I’m the Student Council president! It’s my duty to go!”

“Don’t change the subject.” The naked idiot struck a pose and pointed at her. “Can you make it in time and come back alive? Who can you save? Answer that first.”

“Well...”

She did not stand a chance. She knew that all too well.

Crushing Satomi was not Hashiba’s only reason for beginning this Korean expedition.

...They’re here to hold Kantou in check.

Since Musashi was on its way to Kantou, they had eliminated Edo and begun their Korean expedition to give themselves a foothold in Kantou. And once that happened, there was nothing Satomi could do.

Hashiba would have brought more than just the Azuchi, so if Yoshiyasu tried to fly over with Righteousness, she would be shot down before she even reached Satomi.

“Satomi Yoshiyasu.”

She heard Masazumi’s voice. The other girl brought a hand to her forehead as if searching for the right words.

“Duty under impossible circumstances is not duty. It is an imposition. In my opinion, at least.”

“Then...”

As she wondered what she was supposed to do, she heard a great noise in the sky behind them.

The rumbling of wind was a greatly amplified version of a very familiar sound. It was something accelerating through the air.

The Azuchi had accelerated after the Musashi.

“———!!”

She looked back, but the school building blocked her view. However, she did see someone standing on the rooftop.

The girl’s silver hair blew in the wind and she held a gunblade in her right arm.

“Ariadust Horizon!!”

The enemy was coming. The enemy tore through the wind in pursuit of the Musashi.

The ship was firing and several gravity barriers broke before her eyes, but Horizon did not take a single step back. After all...

“The enemy is coming.”

The enemy was slowly catching up, unbothered by how much time it was taking.

The enemy’s was a cutting-edge warship. The Musashi had been remodeled ten years before, but it was only a trade ship and the Azuchi’s existence meant it was an outdated model.

The first to reach the rooftop were the white and black Technohexen.

Mitotsudaira came next, the Tachibana couple soon followed, and then the idiot burst through the door to the roof running in a girlish way.

“Horizon!”

He came to hug her, so she stepped out of the way.

The idiot spinning around and falling down seemed to be the cue for the enemy to enter attack range.

Several sign frames appeared with crosses combined in a torii-shape and Horizon fired Lypē Katathlipsē straight at the Azuchi.

She targeted the bridge of the Azuchi’s front central ship. That location was a lot like the ship’s face.

The thick black line produced screams of tearing as it flew in a downwards angle.

But just before the blackness hit, color appeared on the Azuchi.

A white breath burst widely out from the ship’s bow.

It was an ocean barrier. The Azuchi suddenly used the same braking method the Musashi had used.

The wind roared backwards and the creaking of the Azuchi filled the sky.

However, its speed dropped.

The path of the black cannon blast had shifted. By increasing the distance between them, it was falling on the bow instead of the bridge.

Still, the black tearing was going to reach the ship.

“It’s going to hit!!”

Twelve figures stood on the deck there. They seemed unconcerned as the deck shook below their feet and the black attack vanished when it struck them from above.

“...?”

It had been erased.

“What was that?”

Nothing remained except for the Azuchi’s pursuit of the Musashi and the wind blowing between them.

The Logismoi Óplo’s strike had been completely eliminated.

Horizon had lost her attack power.

As the wind blew around her, she looked down at the gunblade in her hand.

She finally faced forward, but everything aboard the slowed Azuchi remained entirely unscathed. She frowned and tilted her head.

“...???”

“Don’t look down the barrel!!”

But then they all saw movement on the Azuchi’s deck.

It came from Hashiba, the foremost of the twelve.

She lowered her raised hand and Asama commented on the action.

“Did she have some kind of weapon?”

“I see.” Horizon nodded and looked at the gunblade in her own hands. “This

truly is a useless weapon. And after it was introduced with such fanfare.”

“M-Master Muneshige! Why did you fall to your knees!? A-are you okay!?”

But as they watched the Azuchi and Hashiba, Hashiba did something else.

She pulled a microphone from her pocket, held it up in both hands, and tilted her monkey mask up so it would not get in the way.

“G-good evening. ...I am Hashiba Hideyoshi. I am technically under Master Maeda Toshiie’s command here.”

A voice reached them as they moved away and that voice contained a slight tremor.

“Um... Please make up your mind before the Azuchi accelerates again and catches up. Make up your mind about surrendering to us, that is. But...i-if you don’t surrender, um...”

She hesitated.

“On Master Maeda Toshiie’s orders, I will shoot down the Musashi for the Battle of Mikatagahara. ...The Musashi has not arrived at its headquarters yet, so, um, sinking it will...end this.”

No one on the Musashi knew how to respond, but...

“What!?”

The naked idiot stepped out onto the edge of the roof. After performing a full spin, he pointed at Hideyoshi with both hands.

“Who do you think you are!? Who says you get to act so self-important!?”

“Eek. Um, uh, well... Aren’t you...cold?”

“That’s a good point!” muttered the others, but the idiot only tilted his head.

“Let me ask something.” He crossed his arms with his head still tilted. “Why are you asking us to surrender? Have we done anything wrong?”

That’s very true, thought Tenzou as he pulled Mary’s hand on the way up to

the roof.

...For one thing, the Battle of Mikatagahara does not end with Matsudaira's surrender.

“And we are guaranteed to become her enemy, so why would she ask us to surrender when she could destroy us?”

Also, he thought just before Horizon spoke.

“Why? Why are you asking us to surrender after using a weapon of mass destruction like the dragon line reactor? That is contradictory. Why are you forcing loss onto others while giving us a choice?”

“Well...”

Hashiba was growing more distant and her voice grew weaker, but her trembling voice still reached them through the shared wide-range divine network.

“That is...my duty.”

“Your duty?” asked Horizon.

“Testament,” replied Hashiba. “E-even if it is contradictory, even if it has to be by force, even if it is unfair, and even if it is done through fear, I-I will rule the Far East. And to accomplish that, um, I-I will take away anything that opposes me.”

“Oh, is that what they call a terrible rain?” asked the idiot.

“Do you mean a reign of terror?”

“Wow!”

When everyone expressed their amazement that Hashiba could figure out what the idiot meant, she tensed her shoulders a bit and laughed proudly.

But...

“N-no, that isn't it. Or rather, um, y-you can call it a reign of terror, but...the warring states period and the Thirty Years' War will be over before long,” she explained. “So how about it? If it will end this sooner, I am willing to use a dragon line reactor and...to show you what happens when you oppose me. If anyone is lost, I can do the math and show that it was the smallest possible

sacrifice and that it shortened the war by as much as possible. And once all of that is settled...Master Nobunaga and I will deal with the Apocalypse.”

“———”

Tenzou noticed Mary squeezing his hand when she heard that.

...That's right.

Hashiba was arguing from an idealistic standpoint. Even if she did show off her dragon line reactor and tried to crush Satomi for the history recreation, she could not eliminate all desire to oppose her. Yoshiyasu's desire to rush in and fight was the perfect example.

But to keep the rebels to a minimum, she could have her opponent surrender by using the dragon line reactor as a negotiation tool.

...That previous dragon line reactor may have destroyed Edo Bay, but it didn't directly hit the land.

She had used the blast to preemptively break their defenses and demonstrate her power. It would have caused a lot of damage, but she could still claim it was only a warning.

She had likely concluded that would reduce the number of victims in the long run. So...

“This is one form of a war economy. And it is one way for a leader to build her resolve.”

He understood all too well why Mary nodded at his comment.

Their methods were different from Hashiba's and they probably had different visions of the future, but there was a time when a leader needed to resolve him or herself to accept everything that came with fulfilling their dream.

Mary had done so and so had Horizon.

...I'm not so sure about that idiot, though. Well, he probably has. Maybe. No, wait. I need to question him about that.

“...Master Tenzou? Why do you look so serious?”

“Oh, um, I was just thinking about how wonderful you are, Mary-dono.”

“Oh, my.”

Gin looked over at them with a look of disbelief, but Tenzou felt that was unfair given how those two acted from time to time.

At any rate, he heard a voice. It was Hashiba’s trembling voice and she started by breathing in.

“I believe that...that the world will need you afterwards. So I want to...keep you alive. But...”

But...

“You are not needed yet. We will unify the Far East and deal with the Apocalypse.”

She gave her ultimatum.

“So p-please surrender.”

Masazumi gasped as she wondered what to do.

The decision fell to her, but...

...Ahh! I’m so useless!

She could only think of things that did not matter in the slightest here: the procedures of negotiating, how to get the best deal, how to find common ground, and how to choose the best person to negotiate with.

...Why am I so pathetic? Hm?

But no matter how much she judged herself while mimicking the Pope-Chancellor, it was still her duty to actually do something here.

...Whose decision do I need to act on?

Her eyes found the naked idiot first, so she ignored him.

“Horizon.”

“Wait, wait, wait! Seijun, you just looked right past me, didn’t you!?”

“I’ll look at you once you put on some clothes. ...Anyway, can you make a decision here, Horizon?”

The naked idiot kept complaining, but he quieted down when Horizon glared at him. After that, Horizon sighed and spoke to him.

“Do you have anything to say?”

“Eh? Oh, yeah.”

The idiot casually raised a hand toward Hashiba.

“Hey, monkey girl, how are you gonna deal with the Apocalypse? If it’s a secret, I promise I won’t tell anyone else.”

“Waaahhh!!”

Everyone shouted at him.

“He just asked what I decided I probably shouldn’t!!”

Masazumi saw the idiot pout his lips.

“Ehh? Why shouldn’t I ask? If their way is something we can do, then why not do it?”

“Y-y-y-y-y-y’know? You’re pretty much telling everyone that we have no idea how to do it. You’re killing our credibility for Westphalia.”

“Hold on, Seijun. You’re the one that’s doing everything you can to tell them we don’t have a real plan. And if you think about it, they claim they’re on a test flight, but while we were having fun in Europe, they were flying around in stealth mode saying, ‘Eh heh heh. Let’s sneak over to Kantou. Everyone there’s gonna have a heart attack when we pop up out of nowhere.’ They’re clearly gung-ho about all this.”

“W-we were thinking nothing of the sort.”

Everyone nodded at Hashiba’s denial.

“Aoi, don’t assume everyone’s on your level. Everyone else is much higher than you.”

“Y-you really can be cruel sometimes!! ...Anyway, um, Hashiba?”

“Y-yes?” replied the divine transmission.

Then the idiot asked his question.

“What are you going to do once you deal with the Apocalypse?”

Hashiba paused for a moment.

She was at a loss for words, but then a smile appeared on her lips.

“———”

She muttered something under her breath and then lifted her mask which had started to slip down.

“I can’t say.”

She told them she was unable to tell them that, so...

“I see.”

He looked to Matsudaira’s princess, they nodded to each other, and he smiled.

“Then we can’t surrender at the moment.”

He brought a hand to his chin, leaned forward, and placed one foot on the rooftop railing.

“We’ll have to be your enemy.”

“That settles it.”

The Reine des Garous heard the boy’s voice coming from a *signe cadre*.

“I need to take this more seriously. And...”

“And?”

The Reine des Garous urged him on with a smile and the *signe cadre* continued.

“I’ll make sure to give you a proper response so I won’t bring any shame on you.”

“Oh, my.” The Reine des Garous’ smile deepened and she placed a hand on her cheek. “Can I brag that I was the first one you told that to?”

Hashiba gave her response.

She lowered her head toward the boy and the girl.

“I-I look f-forward to, um, being your enemy.”

She breathed in and took a step back toward the others behind her.

“I-I will conquer the Far East and...deal with the Apocalypse. If that comes to a fight, then...um...I will be the one to win. After all, uh, I come first. My rule comes first in history, so...”

So...

“I will teach you that, um, there is nothing you can do...at the moment.”

Tenzou saw their distance from Hashiba growing. The Musashi was accelerating, but it could not use its full power at the moment. They seemed to be pulling away from the Azuchi, but it would close in as soon as it accelerated again.

However...

“...?”

Something moved in between the Azuchi and the Musashi.

“The P.A. Oda fleet.”

That fleet had arrived here after finishing the battle with Qing-Takeda. Most of the ships were damaged, but there were enough of them to change the color of the sky. They had circled in from Edo to the south and they surrounded the Azuchi, but...

...Doesn't this mean the Azuchi can't speed up?

The Nagahama and Sunomata also hung in midair as if protecting the Azuchi. The Shirasagi Mk. II was as well.

Tenzou thought about what this formation meant and came to a sudden realization.

“Neshinbara-dono, is this what I think it is?”

“Judge,” replied the boy who had arrived on the rooftop. “This is the Battle of Mikatagahara.”

“Um, are you listening?” Hashiba’s voice reached them again. “I-I will teach you what a sacrifice is. And, um, to do that...well, uh, I have an idea of how we can end the Battle of Mikatagahara.”

Namely...

“We will end M-Mikatagahara with the, um, charge and death of Naruze... Masayoshi.”

And if they did not want that...

“Please...surrender.”

Naruze saw the others turn toward her.

...What is it now?

Margot was still looking at Hashiba, but she was squeezing Naruze’s hand. That definite strength said she was not letting go.

...But Margot can’t say no if I ask her.

Margot knew that and that was why she did not turn toward Naruze. She only stared at Hashiba as if ignoring Naruze.

But even an idiot could understand the situation. Even if they tried to run, the enemy would continue pursuing them no matter where they went.

The chancellor’s officers had been sent data on the Musashi’s status, so Naruze knew they were almost out of fuel. But despite that, something else filled her heart.

“All I can think about are ideas for doujinshi about running away!!”

“I can’t believe you can say that out loud.”

Four Eyes: “I just hope the event hall in Edo wasn’t destroyed.”

When she saw those words on her sign frame, Naruze looked around and

found Neshinbara.

“Come here a moment. I have something important to discuss with you. Yes, stand next to me like that.”

She wrapped an arm around Neshinbara’s neck, pulled him close, and opened a sign frame.

“Say cheese. Aaaaand sent to Shakespeare. ...Oh, you can go now. I need to put on some perfume to cover up the nerd-stench on my arm.”

“Wh-what have you done!? Did you really have to make my life more dangerous than it already is!?”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Naruze took a deep breath, and...

“Margot, will you go with me?”

“Eh?”

Margot must not have expected that because she turned around. Naruze was glad to finally look her in the eye.

“Weiss Fräulein won’t be fixed until tomorrow, so can I ride on the back of Schwarz Fräulein?”

Margot fully turned her way at that question.

“Y-you can’t, Ga-chan! Aren’t we always saying we’re going to keep living together!”

“That’s true and that’s why I’m prepared to drag you into this by saying this: let’s keep living together.”

She faced Margot as she continued.

“I have no intention of dying. I’m just bad at living on my own and I’m not sure I can do it.”

If she needed to apologize to anyone, it was to all of them, but she said what she did to make sure she did not have to apologize.

“Let’s charge in, attack Hashiba, and end their invasion. This is the perfect

opportunity. ...Isn't that a positive way of looking at this?"

"You cannot," said Horizon. "We know we are outnumbered and we do not know what exactly the enemy can do, so if the alternative is giving them you, then I will order the Musashi as a whole to attack."

"You really are stupid. ...If we do that when we're this outnumbered, we'll lose a whole lot more. Listen. When it's just the two of us, we can make a run for it and escape if it comes to it."

"I-if you do that, we will demand a substitute," cut in Hashiba.

"She sure is thorough!!" complained the others.

"Umm," thought Naruze. "If a substitute will do, is there anyone in Musashi we'd be fine with losing?"

"Wait, Naruze!" shouted Urquiaga. "In self-defense, let me make one thing very clear! We must not allow anyone on the Musashi to be lost. Isn't that right, Ohiroshiki!? All life is valuable! You pedo!"

"Ha ha ha. I agree! We shouldn't accept anyone's death! Isn't that right, you elder sister loving nonhuman!"

A few of them started heating up, but it never spread to Tenzou because he had Mary with him.

Naruze watched the others loudly attack each other.

...Well, whatever. It's always like this.

She smiled a little and shrugged.

"We just have to win is all. ...And Horizon, covering for us by sending out the Musashi and all these horrible people would be an awful plan, so be careful."

After all...

"That's exactly what they want. They knew how you would react, so they set this up to have you say this. They don't want us to surrender. They want to defeat and conquer Musashi. So we can't let them use you. Your ideals are your own, so we can't let someone else abuse them. ...And that's the job of those of us who follow you and that idiot."

“Hold on, Black Mal. If we let you do that, Horizon’s and my policy will fall apart. No one will be able to trust Musashi anymore.”

“And,” said Naruze. “That’s why we’re planning to live. We aren’t heading out to die or to be killed. So order us to hunt down Hashiba. Tell us we can pull it off. Isn’t that enough?”

She wrapped her arms around Margot’s arm as she asked. And...

“Yes. Planning to live. That’s exactly what this is.”

A voice reached them from above.

...*Eh?*

Naruze looked up and saw a giant figure standing on the roof of the rooftop’s entranceway.

The God of War had its flight devices on its back opened and it was facing the Azuchi.

It had canine head armor, but unlike the blue Righteousness it was green.

The word Loyalty was written in white on its waist armor, so that had to be the God of War’s name.

It raised a pole bearing the emblem of Musashi Ariadust Academy and the individual waving that school flag spoke.

“I, Satomi Yoshiyori, have temporarily inherited the name Naruse Masayoshi, so I will be going.”

Chapter 94: Searcher for a Place to Live

CHAPTER 94

"The Searcher for a Place to Live"

What if the location in your dreams
Is beyond that which you protect?
Point Allocation (Leader)



What if the location in your dreams

Is beyond that which you protect?

Point Allocation (Leader)

Satomi Yoshiyori was inheriting the name Naruse Masayoshi and making a charge. The first to react to his announcement was Suzu on Musashino's bridge.

...I-I knew it!

Something had occurred to her back in IZUMO. On the morning after they had spied on Noriki and Ujinao's conversation, Yoshiyori had arrived and mentioned the discussions Musashi would eventually have in Kantou.

...H-he said we would need to speak with "Satomi".

Not with him, but with someone else. That was what he had meant by "Satomi".

In that case, she thought. He had to have already predicted this name inheritance.

...A-and if he's made up h-his mind...!

She gave a shout to the group on the academy's roof in the model before her eyes.

"Stop...him!"

...What?

Yoshiyasu was baffled by the current situation. She had known Yoshiyori had brought Loyalty along as a spare for Yatsufusa, but a sign frame had just appeared by her hand. A great mass of text was scrolling by on it.

"Wh-what is this!? Yoshiyori! What is the meaning of this!?"

Why?

"Why are you sending me the ownership rights and inheritance information for Yatsufusa!?"

She took a step toward him, toward Loyalty which already had light filling its flight devices.

“What are you planning to do, Yoshiyori!?”

She was irritated by the scolding tone of her voice. Why did she always end up like this with him? But he only nodded as if accepting it.

“Yoshiyasu. I am leaving you with Musashi Ariadust Academy. You will be treated as an exchange student, but travel the world with them and observe everything you can. The experience is sure to help Satomi later.”

And...

“Pass on a message to all of Satomi: Anyone who wishes to surrender should surrender to Hashiba and anyone who wishes to fight back should leave Satomi land and begin their fight in Kantou or any other nation. ...This is an order from Satomi Chancellor Satomi Yoshiyori.”

Yoshiyasu knew what those words meant. That was why she tried to stop him.

But before she could, the nudist gave a shout.

“You idiot! Weren’t you listening to what we just said!? What the hell are you thinking!?”

Yoshiyori looked to the Musashi chancellor and Student Council president and to their princess.

The former took a few steps toward him and pointed right at his eyes.

“If you’ve inherited the name of Naruse whoever, then you count as an exchange student, right!? Then do what I say! You aren’t going to go off and die to solve this!”

After seeing the princess nod by his side, Yoshiyori decided this was an excellent academy. So...

“Yes, so let me say one thing. It is true I am a temporary transfer student now, but that also means I am still a Satomi student. And...”

He hesitated but finally said it.

“The Bunroku Campaign is my responsibility.”

“What!? The hell’s the Bunroku Campaign? ...What’s that look for, you guys!? Fine, I admit it! I’m an idiot! Y-you wanna fight!?”

When the others glared at him, the chancellor and Student Council president hung his head and sat with his arms around his knees. But Musashi’s secretary gave a nod and looked Yoshiyori’s way.

“Your nation uses a God of War fighting force, doesn’t it?”

“Testament. No, I suppose it’s ‘judge’ now. ...That is exactly right, Musashi Secretary. To defend ourselves, we amassed more power than we knew what to do with. That is why P.A. Oda once attacked us through Houjou.”

That battle had been Yatsufusa’s first and it had ended in victory. But...

“Then...”

Yoshiyasu’s voice escaped her lips. The sign frame by her hand would be displaying the details. She would be seeing Yatsufusa’s combat records and all the information related to its usage.

Needless to say, that included why her sister had died.

“My sister...”

Her face had grown pale.

“She committed suicide to take responsibility and stop the P.A. Oda invasion that would have come afterwards?”

What the sign frame displayed was something like a memo or journal left by her sister.

The records were automatically created from the thoughts of the individual combined with Yatsufusa and they could help with maintenance and with understanding various other data. But what Yoshiyasu saw there was a little different.

...My sister...

It recorded what she had thought of Yoshiyasu, of Satomi, and of him.

"I'm sorry."

Just before her death, when she had been flying back from crushing the P.A. Oda fleet, she had spoken to him via divine transmission.

"Suicide would be a disgrace to Satomi. It would mean gaining this strength was a mistake in and of itself. It would mean we could only surrender even after gaining this strength. It would feel like everything we had done was a waste. So I'm sorry, but please shoot me down. And then tell P.A. Oda you decided to do so yourself out of a sense of responsibility."

With a smile on her lips, Yoshiyasu's sister had admitted she was afraid to die. And...

"As I've said before...I hope all of this kind of thing is gone by my sister's generation."

Yoshiyasu saw Loyalty spread its wings in the night.

The word "loyalty" referred to properly serving one's master or nation, so...

"Why didn't you tell me!?"

She knew why. He had needed the people to feel anger and doubt toward him for killing her sister.

And that had indeed happened. But...

...If I had known why, I wouldn't have been able to blame you!

By not telling her, he had given her the same anger and doubt as the people living in Satomi.

"Did you do it to protect me!?"

He did not respond. She knew he would not. Keeping this truth hidden had been his form of loyalty.

He then nodded toward Musashi's chancellor and Student Council president and their princess.

"P.A. Oda saw our power as a threat to their control of Kantou. Musashi, that is why I needed to meet with you in a hurry now that their aerial forces have expanded to the point of making an invasion of Kantou a reality. Even if doing so

required abandoning the nation of Satomi itself...it was worth it to be able to leave Satomi's successors – that is, Yatsufusa and Yoshiyasu – with you."

His God of War crouched down. He was preparing to take flight and Yoshiyasu had seen the movement countless times before.

She had seen it whenever he stood before her in Yatsufusa and prepared to race ahead at the front of the vanguard.

She had always wondered why he stood out front and did not seem to care when it led to injuries.

"I am Satomi Chancellor Satomi Yoshiyori. ...Musashi Chancellor and Student Council President, this is my academy's problem, so I will solve it using our methods."

So...

"I will strike down Hashiba here."

And he had one more thing to say.

"If I fail, take care of Satomi's future and of Yoshiyasu."

With that said, he fully opened the flight device wings.

He was about to leave.

"Someone stop that idiot!"

Hearing Toori's cry, Tenzou ran after Loyalty.

Futayo, Muneshige, Mitotsudaira, Urquiaga, Hassan with his curry, and even Nenji responded and hurried toward the crouched God of War.

They did not know if they could stop him or not, but...

"Please."

Pushed on by Horizon's word, they continued forward.

But someone else weakly followed them, one step behind.

It was Yoshiyasu. She bent forward, reached out her hand, and contorted her face.

“No!” she shouted. “Wait!!”

Loyalty opened its wings wide as if acknowledging her plea.

A moment later, a giant form dropped down from above Loyalty.

The red humanoid figure was Jizuri Suzaku.

While the others drew his attention by running along the rooftop, the God of War had moved to stop him from above. On its shoulder, Naomasa clenched her false arm’s fist.

“I’ll stop him!”

With only a brief moment before the Gods of War collided, Naomasa heard Yoshiyori speak.

“If the worst happens, take care of Yatsufusa and Yoshiyasu. Yatsufusa is sure to help with your research. After all...”

After all...

“The flight devices, engines, and OSs our Gods of War use are based on the plans and data a previous generation received when battling the Ming remnants in Takeda. Most likely...it was based on the flight devices from the Suzaku of the Four Sacred Beasts.”

...What!?

In that instant, sign frames bearing the Suzaku emblem opened across Jizuri Suzaku’s body.

The OS was activating by resonating with a fellow Sacred Beast, but it was not resonating with Loyalty.

...It came in contact with the ether information for the Yatsufusa’s transfer of ownership. Is that why it’s booting up!?

The incomplete OS resonance expanded the virtual lake behind Jizuri Suzaku.

“!?”

The course of her fall was diverted, but Yoshiyori’s response made it sound like

that did not even matter.

“Thank you.”

Light exploded below Naomasa.

Loyalty had taken off. The pursuing Technohexen were blown away and the God of War flew straight toward the Azuchi.

In the instant he took flight, Yoshiyori heard Yoshiyasu’s voice.

“Don’t go!!”

She was crying, she was yelling, and she reached her hand out toward him.

And that was what solidified his resolve.

...Oh, I see.

He realized that the misunderstanding he had given her was now gone.

That was for the best. He also knew very well what her shouts and pleas meant. She had been the kind of person who did not want him to go.

He had a number of thoughts about the matter, but he knew holding just that one in his heart was the right thing for him to do.

...So I need to fulfill my promise.

He recalled the final words he had exchanged with her sister. She had spoken to him as he had held her limp body in his arms. And she had smiled as she did so.

...“Smile. It doesn’t have to be today. But someday.”

His current God of War face had no expressions, so he could not form a smile.

But he believed in his heart that he was smiling.

He had left behind no more misunderstandings, he had passed on what was to be inherited, and...

...Yes!

He had seen a place where the people would and could say they refused to let

someone die.

...That is what I couldn't do and what I couldn't have!!

So he was certain that this place called Musashi was even greater than they had been. That was why he smiled. He loosened his body and breathed in.

“Don’t worry. I am not heading out to die.”

He said it.

“I am finally heading out to not give up on anything and to live.”

As he formed the words, he flew full speed toward the battlefield.

“Can you hear me, Musashi Chancellor?”

As everyone came to a speechless stop, the light of flight flew quickly through the distant battlefield sky. That light trailed behind Loyalty’s wings and the explosions of combat followed it around.

Loyalty was paving a path of blossoming explosions through the sky, but his voice was calm as it reached them.

“There is one thing you once said. Do you remember it? I certainly do. You said your princess isn’t someone who can only die. You said she isn’t someone who has no option besides being killed,” he said. “You were exactly right and even we had other options.”

When he had heard the PR committee’s broadcast of Mikawa, Yoshiyori had felt he understood that selfish thought. The boy who had tried to rescue his princess had not just wanted to get people to fight alongside him.

...He wanted to see whether it was possible for him to save his princess or not.

No one was destined to die. It was only an issue of whether they could be saved or not.

And that boy had people to fight by his side.

What about for Yoshiyori and for her? He felt there had been a possibility not

requiring her death.

But that incident in Mikawa had given him a certain thought.

If no one is destined to die, then we too could have lived.

...So Yoshiyasu, nothing like what happened to us will happen again.

Where you are now, you won't need to lose anything like we did.

So...

“Musashi Chancellor and Student Council President!”

Yoshiyori stated his desire.

“Let me say this: when faced with the coming battles, you must smile!”

“Listen,” said Satomi’s chancellor. “No matter what you might lose from here on out and even if you feel moved to tears, all of you must smile. Even if you end up smiling at someone like me and everyone but you is crying, you need to smile as long as you can keep fighting! No matter what might happen, you absolutely must smile!”

Loyalty completely broke through the wind.

It flew straight ahead while wrapped in a shaking of the air. Its target was the Azuchi’s deck.

“And make sure to save anyone trying to do what she and I did!!”

The density of anti-air fire grew.

Loyalty’s right shoulder and left thigh had been broken, but its speed only trembled and did not drop.

“Here goes!”

But something moved in front of it.

It was the Nagahama.

The two kilometer warship used itself as a shield to protect Hashiba.

Loyalty drew the large sword from its back as it accelerated through the sky. It was a gunblade. It was not as powerful as Murasamemaru, but that meant its strength could vary greatly depending on its wielder's skill.

Loyalty attacked.

The Orei Metallo blade manifested the strength poured into the blow more than the physical slash itself. The spell carved into Loyalty's blade based its power on the word "loyalty".

Loyalty meant to support from the background and to set the stage. So...

"Break!!"

A massive surface-wide strike slammed into the Nagahama.

It was destroyed.

The Nagahama had originally been a transport ship, so once cracks formed in the original interior, it completely broke apart.

It was sliced through.

A hundred meter hammer had struck the giant ship, destroying two rows of its interior sections.

The cries of strain and roars of wind provided background music as the Nagahama broke down the center after having its interior torn away.

Loyalty flew through there with a shockwave enveloping its body. As it passed through the central slice taken from the Nagahama, the shockwave slammed into the front and back halves on either side.

Warships were built to endure external attack, but that was why they were weak to shocks from within. The frames and interior hull were built to jut outward, which only helped the power trying to push them out from within.

And that was exactly what happened.

As if struck by a wave on the inside, the Nagahama burst apart, starting from the hole and spreading both to the bow and stern. That destruction bent the internal hull and armor panels, slammed into them from within, and blasted them off the ship. And after the shockwave passed through, air began to rush

inside.

“...!!”

The Nagahama quickly swelled out and exploded.

Pushed on by the Nagahama's destruction, Loyalty moved closer to the Azuchi.

It was not unharmed.

The shockwave produced by its high-speed sword strike had damaged its entire body. It had lost most of its armor and its wings were broken, but...

“...!”

Loyalty charged toward Hashiba on the Azuchi's deck.

But then Loyalty broke apart.

The Azuchi's main cannons had fired.

A defense barrier above the Azuchi's deck buffered against the shockwave.

Above that, the three-stage matchlock-style main cannons tore into Loyalty.

The God of War's right half vanished in an instant and the impact propagated across its entire body.

“————!!”

Its armor burst from within and most of the facial devices scattered into the air.

But everyone saw what the dog did next.

“Ohhh!!”

It roared and let light explode from the destroyed wings remaining on its back.

Yoshiyori continued on.

He had already lost his right arm and leg, but the enemy shellfire had only grown.

As his consciousness faded, he simply willed himself onward.

...Yes.

He used his broken gunblade and his entire body to stab and break through the gravity barrier opened before his eyes.

The sword vanished and so did his left arm up to the elbow, but...

...Rise, my knee!

He used his remaining left knee to break through the next gravity barrier.

The great noise reverberated through his entire body and he felt like the very core of that body had vanished.

And in exchange, he could see Hashiba down below.

He had no more weapons, arms, or legs, but the wings on his back still functioned.

...That's right.

He realized that they had once chosen to be lost.

But in so choosing...

...We were not trying to give up, die, and disappear!

He understood now why she had told him to smile and why she had hidden the meaning of her death.

...She wanted to protect a place where we would always want to keep living!!

Confident that they had not chosen death because they had given up, Yoshiyori continued on.

“Ohhhhhh!”

He charged toward Hashiba head-first as if trying to devour her with the fangs of the canine head armor.

He felt everything grow clear as he broke through the air and he realized something.

Even now, his mind was still smiling.

And he had another thought while moving toward Hashiba.

...If I manage to survive this, I need to live without fear.

He would no longer hide that he was alive. He would smile and live such that death was placed behind him in the past.

But, he thought as something entered his view.

He had seen the shape of what Hashiba held in her raised right arm.

“Do you really think...”

He faced forward and roared while accelerating in as straight a line as possible.

“...that’s enough for me to give up!?”

A moment later, an exploding flower blossomed in the sky.

After lowering her right arm, Hashiba saw something in the wind directly before her.

It was a giant fang.

The metal fang had stabbed at and torn deeply into her left arm from the shoulder to the upper arm.

Looking at its base was enough to know who it belonged to. That owner was directly in front of her.

“Loyalty’s head armor.”

The armor was mostly broken, but its mouth was opened wide.

However, what lay beyond the head could only be called wreckage.

So she nodded and...

“Nn...”

She removed the bitten left arm at the base.

It was a mechanical false arm.

Shaking her lightened body, she saw what stood before her.

The flag of Ariadust Academy stood tall from within the wreckage.

After a moment, she lowered her head deeply at this result.

“The Satomi Chancellor has, u-um, fulfilled the requirement.”

She breathed in, trembled once, and continued speaking.

“On our side, the N-Nagahama was destroyed, eighteen small ships were destroyed, and twenty-one small ships were damaged. ...That is light damage. So, um, I now declare the Battle of Mikatagahara...complete.”

She raised her head and saw the Musashi growing smaller to the north.

She breathed out and spoke toward the Musashi’s back.

“Until we...um...meet again somewhere.”

Masazumi felt in a complete daze.

...What am I supposed to make of this?

They had left the rooftop and gathered on the academy bridge. If they had remained on the rooftop, it had felt like they would have fallen to their knees right then and there; so Asama and Kimi had supported Yoshiyasu as she cried.

“I guess we’re finally in the clear.”

“Judge. Far too much has happened today.”

Mitotsudaira’s shoulders drooped and her comment had to be especially true for her.

The school building blocked their view, but based on Suzu’s report from the Musashino’s bridge, they could no longer detect any enemy ships in the southern sky.

...I guess Hashiba has left now that Mikatagahara is over.

“But this means the Edo region has fallen under Hashiba’s control.”

A great number of problems had presented themselves all at once: Hashiba’s invasion, the Musashi’s damage, their fuel, and most importantly...

“What do you think, Neshinbara?”

“This is the reverse of before. ...That changes my assessment, so are you sure

you want to hear it?”

“Tell me.”

Everyone on the bridge looked to him, but he continued typing records into his sign frame as he spoke.

“We lost. I can’t put it any other way.”

No one said a thing, but they could hear Yoshiyasu’s sobs as she tried to hold them back. Kimi gave her a light hug and tried to comfort her with a bitter smile of resignation.

“Heh heh. It’s best to cry when you feel like it. C’mon, Asama, let’s completely surround her in breasts for double the calming! ...Oh? What are you looking at, flat politician and flat knight!? Do you want to be surrounded, too!?”

Figuring the crazy person’s consolation would at least distract the girl, Masazumi decided to ignore them. But...

“Where’s Aoi?”

She found the naked boy at the very back of the group.

He seemed to be silently contemplating something as he stood perfectly still behind them all.

“Hey...”

Just as she started to tell him not to feel sad, Horizon made a sudden move.

She walked over next to him and made a horizontal chop to the back of his neck.

Everyone looked puzzled as a harsh sound of struck flesh filled the air.

“Owww! Wh-what was that for, Horizon!?”

“Judge. Before you feel sad and croak, I thought I would knock you out the way Futayo-sama taught me.”

“Oh... Sorry, was I worrying-owwww! H-how do you make it hurt that bad!?”

“Oh? How very strange. But anyway...”

Horizon asked him a question.

“Are you okay?”

“Eh?”

The naked idiot looked at them all, at Masazumi, and at everything.

He then let out a slow breath and spoke in a tone of resignation.

“He told us to smile when he went out to defeat that monkey girl.”

“I see.”

Masazumi nodded, decided he would be fine, and still lowered her shoulders.

“Anyway, we have quite a few problems to deal with now.”

Just as she was going to ask what to do now, a sudden chill seemed to surround her body and it quickly transformed into fog.

“Everyone!”

A sign frame opened and emitted Suzu’s voice.

“Th-there’s something in...stealth u-up ahead!!”

“Is it the enemy!?”

Futayo took a defensive stance despite being unarmed, but she saw something else up ahead.

“Fog!?”

They were enveloped by a horizontal drift of fog that almost looked like a body of water.

The fog looked white even at night as it covered the Musashi, leaving only the elevated places visible.

The bridge in front of the academy was one such place.

But the fog flowing by up to their feet was so deep they could not see the bottom.

“Is this...?”

Yoshiyasu spoke in a weak and confused voice, but she did indeed recognize

what she saw around her.

“A hidden village!?”

“What?”

Adele tilted her head, but Neshinbara was excitedly looking around.

“Now this is rare! It’s Oushuu. This is the land of the Fujiwara clan that once sheltered Lady Yoshitsune! The direct line of long-lived who live here have hidden in Oushuu ever since they parted with the Kamakura Shogunate! That’s why they always had a subordinate group use transport ships to trade with Musashi.”

Neshinbara received a response.

Countless forms floated up from the depths of the fog.

They lifted the fog like a cascade.

“Is this a city made up of aerial ships!?”

They were all old models of transport ships. None of them reached even one hundred meters and there were only a few dozen of them, but they spread out to meet the Musashi with the fog spilling from them like waterfalls.

That was not all. Something else arrived from beyond them.

It resembled a giant piece of land and it bore the emblem of IZUMO on the front.

It was a huge floating dock.

Floodlights activated and the Oushuu ships followed them toward the floating dock.

“Isn’t that the Musashi’s floating dock from Kantou IZUMO!?”

As if to answer Mitotsudaira, figures appeared on all of the ships.

Direct-line long-lived appeared on the Oushuu ships while students in Far Eastern uniforms and adults in lab coats appeared on the floating dock. Then, a voice was broadcasted.

“Musashi, this is the Ariake, Kantou IZUMO’s floating dock for the Musashi. I’m Mishina Shouichi, the supervisor here.”

Hiro looked up and said “oh, it’s dad”, but the man continued speaking.

“Satomi’s chancellor had already given us his opinion and IZUMO HQ sent us information from Hexagone Française concerning the enemy’s approach. After evacuating the people of Edo and Satomi, we came here. We didn’t expect for Oushuu to shelter us and it seems to have been Lady Yoshitsune’s doing, but...”

He said “but” again.

“You did a good job making it this far. We’ll do our very best to give the Musashi the best modifications we can.”

Last Chapter: Stewers in a Gathering Place

LAST CHAPTER

"Stewers in a Gathering Place"



How is
Everyone doing?

Point Allocation (Together)

How is

Everyone doing?

Point Allocation (Together)

Suzu hurried.

The fog had cleared and only the chilly night sky was visible up above.

She had heard that the clouds had cleared away and the moon was out. She ran through the chill of that air.

She had left the docking procedure to “Musashino” and she was on her way to the bridge in front of the academy.

Everyone was there and they were not moving.

They may have been so exhausted they had fallen asleep, but she was worried.

...They're okay...aren't they?

A lot had happened, but they would be back on their feet soon, wouldn't they?

She trusted in that, but worrying about it was a different issue.

So she hurried. Suzu hurried. She took high steps so as not to trip as she ran as quickly as she could manage.

She made her way down the road and arrived at the steps.

“Yes.”

She wanted to climb them quickly, so she used the railing.

She counted the steps so she would not take a step that was not there and she felt herself breathe as she climbed them.

...We'll be okay.

The people of Kantou IZUMO had said they would make the Musashi better than new.

“Everyone.”

It doesn't have to be long, so bear with it.

“If we do...”

They would be given the power to fight.

They would be given the power to hurry.

They would be given the power to protect.

But the elder representing Oushuu had said that would be useless if the hearts of the ones to use it had died.

They had lost their will to fight.

They had lost their will to hurry.

They had lost their will to protect.

They had lost people important to them, they had been shown their enemy’s power, and they had been hopelessly pursued.

That was why the elder had said the following: “Hopefully, you do not begin to think that nothing you can do will help.”

Suzu understood what that meant.

Their enemy had the dragon line reactors, a great ship, and a way of negating the power of Horizon’s Logismoí Óplo. On top of that, they had opposed various influential people and been hopelessly outmatched.

There had been nothing for them to do, so...

“If you wish to avoid fighting, you and the Musashi can always live here with us. Of course, I believe they would find you even here.”

Suzu was ashamed that she had thought Oushuu’s offer had sounded somewhat like a good idea.

That was why she had declared so certainly that they would be okay.

She felt like the sentence had come out whole for once. But...

...We will be okay, won’t we?

She hurried. She pulled herself up by the railing and knew she would be reaching the top soon.

“Eh?”

The railing vanished.

A piece had been torn off by the enemy's attacks.

Oh, no, thought Suzu.

She had not noticed because it was always there and she had assumed it still would be.

Realizing it was gone after the fact was a hopeless mistake.

It was too late by the time she noticed. She had bent back while pulling herself up the railing and her hands groped through empty air.

"...!"

She let out a voiceless scream.

"C'mon, Bell-san. You're late."

Someone pulled on her hand, brought her feet back onto the steps, and then gave a strong tug on her hand.

"Toori...-kun!?"

"That's right."

He sounded proud of that fact, but his voice was a bit weaker than usual.

"Everyone's waiting up top. We're having a strategy meeting."

Suzu arrived on the bridge with Toori pulling on her hand and Horizon supporting her.

...Eh?

She felt heat.

There was nothing strange about the scene she found. They were all sitting or standing while either exchanging glances or a few words. But...

...What is...this?

She felt like she was standing on the ground when it was heated by the

sweltering summer sun.

...They're...stewing?

They all wanted to say something or do something, but they were holding back.

“...”

They knew that now was not the time to act, so they held it all inside and let it stew.

They were not all like that. It was true a few of them remained cool.

But, thought Suzu.

...Some of them are angry, hiding their desire to act, and stewing away.

So...

“Right.”

...We'll be okay.

She trusted in that fact and made sure her heart would remember it.

She was certain that they would be okay. She was more certain than she had ever been before.

“...Right.

Suzu wondered what would happen if they were all certain of what would happen.

What if they regained the will to fight?

What if they regained the will to hurry?

What if they regained the will to protect?

...And...

What if they gained the power to fight?

What if they gained the power to hurry?

What if they gained the power to protect?

...What would happen then?

“We’re going to...be okay.”

Everyone turned toward her.

Some voiced their surprise, but they would still be okay. They just had not realized it yet.

So...

“Yes!”

Suzu realized she needed to tell the people of Kantou IZUMO and of Oushuu that they were all going to be okay.

And then Toori faced her.

“Hey, Bell-san. Were we worrying you by any chance?”

“No.”

She shook her head.

“You were...but you aren’t.”

We’re going to be okay, she told herself as the others exchanged a glance.

“There’s no helping that.” Naruze stood up and sighed. “Sitting around isn’t going to help anything.”

But Suzu’s senses could tell that there was no heat in that sigh. The girl was simply looking toward the school building and the southern sky.

“Now, we need to finish up the Battle of Mikatagahara.”

“Eh? ...You don’t mean the stool sample, do you?”

The nudist pulled his hips back as Horizon silently prepared a bowl and chopsticks.

Naruze ignored the two of them, opened a Magie Figur, and readied her pen.

“The poop doesn’t matter, but there is one thing I have to do: the grimace painting.”

She looked to Horizon and Toori, so the others did as well.

“When Lord Matsudaira lost the Battle of Mikatagahara, he had a painting made of his look of anger upon realizing the magnitude of what he had lost. That way he had a reminder of his mistake.”

“You’re going to draw that?”

“Judge.” The Technohexen nodded. “I’ll draw all of you.”

Yes.

“I’ll draw the looks of people who have realized they we only survived thanks to a group who lived through a lot.”

“Judge.” Mitotsudaira nodded and slowly approached the bridge’s railing. “That’s right. We’re probably not even aware of it all, but we have inherited so very much and that has allowed us to live on.”

Mitotsudaira then turned toward the bow.

The floating dock named Ariake was opening up to envelop and protect the entirety of the Musashi.

She opened her mouth as she watched it move.

She started to say something, but first she ground her teeth and looked up into the sky.

When she spoke toward the moon, her words formed a growl but not a howl.

“We need to make sure we repay them for that one day.”

Naruze breathed in, nodded, raised her pen, and spoke to the others.

“I like the look of those expressions, everyone.”

So...

“We’ll be the next ones to set history in motion.”



We will not give up.

Afterword

And with that, we've finished the beginning of Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon's story. You could say the middle of the story begins next time. It's thanks to all of you that I can do this, so thank you very much.

But even if it feels like we've come a long way, they're all just now starting to move in a number of ways. They have their own plans and circumstances, so I think things should be getting pretty busy.

Anyway, the events of the world from the late 1500s to the mid-1600s were a complete mess, weren't they? These things seem to happen every few hundred years and one theory says it's caused by the earth's periodic cycle of warming and cooling. It was during the warring states period that Japan's population grew quite a bit and one theory says it was because it was during a warming period and because the food supply had improved due to the various daimyos starting large-scale land cultivation and flood control to strengthen their states.

Now for the usual chat.

"Do you have any other painful stories from high school?"

"Why is this a three-parter? Wasn't the last one the end?"

"Ha ha ha. You sure are careless."

"You're the worst! This is the same as holding a yakiniku party and, after everyone's eaten a kilogram of meat, saying it's time for dessert and pulling a decorated cake from the fridge!"

"If you understand that it's the same, then go ahead and tell your painful story."

"Okay. After I finished my standing battle with the urinal in high school, my mind must have been wandering when I closed the zipper because I got carried away and zipped something extra up. The most intense pain surged through the

core of my body. But when I tried to unzip it, it was caught too tightly and wouldn't unzip. I concluded I couldn't win the battle standing up, so I made a quick spin and charged right into the stall behind me."

"Everyone else must have been shocked when you suddenly turned around and ran into the stall."

"Not just that, but after I let out a war cry in the stall and tried to unzip my pants, I found I still couldn't do it. I had no choice and you know how they say people get superhuman strength in emergencies, right? Well, I grabbed the top of the zipper and tore my pants in two. After the battle was won, I kept anyone from noticing by letting the pants hang from my waist by the belt and untucking my shirt."

Are there no normal people left in this world? Anyway, my background music this time was Ardet from ANUBIS. It makes me picture a battle waiting to be saved. And on that note...

"Who was saved the most?"

I'll leave you with that. Wait just a bit for the next one.

June 2010. A morning of sudden rain.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ A reference to the tagline for the Japanese snack food Curl/Karl: No matter what happens, your snack is Karl.
2. ↑ AM is also pronounced “gozen” in Japanese.
3. ↑ A kanji pun.
4. ↑ Matsu means wait in Japanese.